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THE BOY EMIGRANTS

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ARTHUR BUILT ONCE MORE HIS GOLDEN DREAM

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THE BOY EMIGRANTS

BY

NOAH BROOKS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

H. T. DUNN

NEW YORK
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To ARTHUR H. PERKINS,

HARTFORD, CONN.

MY DEAR ARTIE:

This little story of the "Boy Emigrants" is written that you and other boys like you may learn something of the strange, eventful history of the early overland travelers to California. If you shall be amused and entertained while you read this simple tale of real adventure I shall be glad; for, although this is in some sense a historical sketch, it is not so long since I was a boy that I have forgotten that mere history is very dry reading to most young folks. The scenery of the book is all taken from nature; many of the characters were real people; and almost all the incidents which here befall the Boy Emigrants came under my own observation, or under that of people whom I knew on the trail or in California.

I have said that this is a historical sketch: and I ought to add that it is a diffident attempt to rescue from forgetfulness some of the traits of a peculiar movement of American population. Many, perhaps most, of the people who undertook the toilsome journey across the continent have passed away. The trail, worn smooth by countless thousands of weary feet, is covered by an iron road; railway trains flash in a few days over the vast spaces where once the wagon of the emigrant crept painfully through months of travel. Towns and villages occupy the old camping-places of the wandering gold-seeker; and the telegraph wire sings through lonely hollows once lighted by his watch-fires. This is all right and natural; but it is only just that those who come after the pioneers should sometimes recall their trials, struggles, and triumphs.

The little company whose haps and mishaps form the slender plot of this story are pleasant types of some of those whom we used to meet on the plains. I hope you will be interested in their varying fortunes; and I am sure you will have no occasion to be ashamed of the young emigrant for whom I have taken the liberty of borrowing your name.

Affectionately yours,

NOAH BROOKS.

NEW YORK, *November*, 1876.

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THE BOY EMIGRANTS

CHAPTER I

HARD TIMES AT HOME

"It's no use talking, Arty, there are too many of us. The pie don't go round."

Arthur smiled a little ruefully as he added to Barnard's complaint: "And Sam and Oliver wear their clothes all out before they can be made over for me."

Barnard—whose whole name, by the way, was Barker Barnard Stevens—showed his confidence in his younger brother's judgment when he said: "As we are a too numerous family, what is to be done about it? Kill off a few?"

Arthur was one of seven—great hearty boys all of them. His trousers were inherited from his elder brother Sam, and had been "turned" in the legs and were already inconveniently short. With an impatient little jerk at the knee of one of these objectionable legs, he said: "Let's emigrate!"

Barnard, five years older, and more cautious, asked: "Where to?"

"Oh, anywhere, so that we have a chance to strike

out for ourselves. Father emigrated from Vermont with all of us young ones, and why shouldn't we put out for the Far West, I'd like to know? It isn't so far from Illinois to Somewhereelse now, as it was from Vermont to Illinois when we were brought here."

"A great deal you know about it, young Arthur boy. Why, you were only six years old when we came here."

"All right, Barney, but I'm fifteen now, and have not studied geography for nothing."

"Boys! boys! it's time to turn in. You've got to go down to Turner's to-morrow after those grain-sacks; and your ma says there's no rye-meal in the house for Saturday's baking."

This was the voice of Farmer Stevens from the porch. The boys had been sitting on the rail-fence in front of the house while the twilight fell. The evening was tranquil but gloomy, and they had taken a somewhat sombre view of family affairs, considering what cheery, hopeful young fellows they were.

But it was a fact that there were too many of them. There were four boys older than Arthur, two younger, and a baby sister. Since the Stevens family had settled in Northern Illinois, things had gone wrong all over the country. First, the chinch-bug came upon them and ate up their crop—and it was not much of a crop, either. Then they had a good year and felt encouraged; but next there fell a sort of blight on the

Rock River region. It was dry in seeding-time and wet in harvest. The smut got into the wheat—and nobody planted anything besides wheat in those days. So, what with rust, mildew, and other plagues, poor Farmer Stevens was left without much more than grain enough to feed his growing boys. His cattle went hungry or to the butchers. From year to year things alternated between bad and worse. It was discouraging.

As the boys climbed down from their perch, Barnard said to his father:

"Arty and I are going to emigrate."

"Yes, to Turner's mill; and be sure you bring back all those grain-sacks, Arthur."

But the watchful mother heard the remark, and said, as the boys lumbered upstairs to bed:

"Barnard was cut-up to-night because he missed his piece of pie. Joe Griffin was here, and it did not go round."

"Well, I must say, mother," replied Farmer Stevens, "it's hard lines when the boys fall out with their provender; but Barney is dreadful notional, and he's out of conceit with Illinois."

"Yes, father, he is a restless boy, and he and Arty set so much by each other; when one goes the other will."

The poor mother laid her sleeping baby in the cradle,

and sat for a moment looking out over the dim landscape beyond the open window.

Sugar Grove was a small settlement on a broken rise of ground. Behind stood a dense grove of sugar-maples, extending two miles east and west. In front of the few houses and the row of wheat-farms was a broad valley, belted with trees, and through which Rock River wound in big curves, now faint in the early summer night. The crop was mostly in the ground, and the little farm looked tidy. But the fences were not in good repair, the house had never been painted, and the whole place seemed pinched and poor.

"This isn't the 'rich West,' after all," sighed Mrs. Stevens sadly; and the tears gathered in her eyes as she thought of her noble boys growing up in such strait circumstances, with defeat and poverty continually before them. "So the pie wouldn't go round? Poor Barney!" The mother laughed a sad little laugh to herself, as she thought of Barnard's grim discontent.

Returning from Turner's, next day, Arthur brought the family mail, which had been left at the mill by some of the neighbors down the road, on their way home from town. It was not a heavy mail; and, as Arthur jogged along on Old Jim, sitting among the grain-sacks, he opened the village newspaper. The *Lee County Banner* was published once a week, and the local news usually occupied half a column. This

week that important part of the paper was led off with a long paragraph headed "Latest News from California! Arrival of Joshua Gates, Esq.!" Arthur held his breath and read as follows:

We take great pleasure in informing our friends and patrons, as well as the public generally, that Joshua Gates, Esq., our esteemed and highly respected fellow-citizen, has just arrived from California, overland. Accompanied by a bold and adventurous band of Missourians, he has crossed the continent in the unprecedented time of sixty-five days, stopping in Mormondom two days to recruit. Our fortunate fellow-citizen brings ample confirmation of the richness of the gold discoveries of California. To say that he brings tangible proof of all this would be to put the case in its mildest form. Our hands have handled and our optics have gazed upon the real stuff brought by our enterprising fellow-citizen, who assures us that the half has not been told us, and that he proposes to return as soon as possible to what may now with extreme propriety be called the Land of Gold, where we are told that a "strike" of hundreds of thousands is a common thing, and any industrious man may make from $15 to $1,500 per day. We welcome our distinguished fellow-citizen home again, and congratulate him on his well-deserved success. We append a few of the reigning prices in California: Flour, $15 per bbl.; pork, $1.50 per lb.; fresh beef, $1.00 to $1.50 ditto; mining boots, $50 per pr.; quinine, $50 per oz.; newspapers, anywhere from $1.00 to $5.00 each.

"Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!
Bright and yellow, hard and cold,
Molten, graven, hammer'd and rolled;
Heavy to get and light to hold."

Arthur did not stop to read the poetry; he folded up the paper with emphasis, jammed it into his pocket,

pulled his straw hat tightly on his head, and said: "The very thing!" Old Jim, who had been browsing off the hazel brush as his young rider absorbed the news, looked around with meek surprise.

"Yes, you old rascal, that's the very thing! We'll go to California, my boy; and when we are picking up the diamonds and gold-dust, won't we tell Old Turner to go hang for an old hunks!"

Jim neighed and pricked up his ears, just as if he understood that the miller had taken more toll from the rye than young Arthur thought he was entitled to.

"Digging up gold in California! Hey, Jim!" and Arthur went cantering up the road as blithely as if he were already in the Land of Gold.

"Say, mother, Josh Gates has got back."

"Has that worthless, miserable vagabond come back to plague his poor old mother once more?" asked the plain-speaking Mrs. Stevens. "Well, well, he's the bad penny, that's certain sure."

"But he's rich—got lots of gold from California—and the *Banner* says he's a distinguished fellow-citizen," remonstrated Arthur, who suddenly reflected, however, that Josh Gates had gone off "between two days," when he departed from Lee County, and that he had been indicted for stealing hens, and that his former reputation in the town of Richardson was not at all fragrant.

Arthur was a little crestfallen, but he handed Sam the paper, and said:

"Perhaps Gates is a liar, as well as a chicken-stealer; but you see the newspaper man says that he has seen his gold-dust; so there!"

"Oh, pshaw!" said his mother, returning to her wash-tub, "these gold stories about California are all got up to help the shipping people. They are selling their vessels, and advertising to take folks out at great prices. So the Chicago papers say!"

"But Josh Gates came back overland, ma," said the boy.

"'Tis my opinion that that scamp has never been farther west than Iowa," cried Sam, holding up the paper with a knowing air. "Hi Fender saw him over to Council Bluffs last fall, sweeping out a billiard saloon. He went from there to St. Louis as deck-hand on a steamboat. He ain't worth shucks."

Having so said, Sam went on mending his ox-yoke, as if the case were finally settled.

That day Arthur and Barnard worked together in the field, putting in a second crop where the first seeding had been winter-killed.. They talked over and over again the chances of the journey to California, the story of the gold discoveries, the truth or falsehood of Josh Gates, and all the ways and means of getting across the continent. About this last branch of

the subject there was a great deal of doubt. It would cost much money.

"But only think, Barney, how grand 'twould be if we could come home in a year or two with lots of gold, pay off the mortgage, build a new house, and fix things comfortable for the folks during the rest of their lives! Wouldn't that pay?" And Arthur, in a great glow of anticipation, scattered the seed-wheat far and wide by big handfuls.

"Take care there, boy! you're throwing away that grain," grumbled Barnard, who was twenty years old, and a little less enthusiastic than Arthur. But he added, "I do just believe there's gold in California; and if we can only figure it out to satisfy the folks, we'll go there by hook or crook."

"It's a whack!" cried Arthur, who was ardent, and a little slangy.

CHAPTER II

GREAT PREPARATIONS

"Now, if I was in a story-book," said Arthur to himself one day, "I should find a wallet in the road with one hundred and fifty dollars in it." One hundred and fifty dollars was just about the sum which the boys had found they needed to complete an outfit for California. Without any formal declaration of their intention, or any expression of opinion from father and mother, Barnard and Arthur had gone on with their plans; but these were all in the air so far. The details worried them a great deal.

There was a spare wagon on the farm which might be fixed up and mended well enough to last for the journey across the Plains. Old Jim could be taken from the plow; but they must have another horse, some mining tools, harness, and provisions. From a New England newspaper they cut a list of articles considered necessary for the journey. It was fascinating, but formidable. This is the way it ran:

1 Wagon	$125 00
Wagon Cover	12 00
	$137 00

	Brought forward	$137 00
2	Horses or Mules	150 00
	Harness	60 00
	Tent	25 00
4	Picks	5 00
2	Shovels	4 40
4	Gold-Pans	1 00
2	Axes	5 50
8	Cwt. Flour	24 00
1	Bush. Beans	1 25
2	Bush. Corn Meal	4 75
1	Cwt. Pork	10 00
4	Cwt. Bacon	44 00
1	Cwt. Sugar	8 00
50	Lbs. Rice	5 50
60	Lbs. Coffee	10 80
	Sundry Small Stores	10 00
	Ammunition	12 00
	Medicines	5 00
	Total	$523 20

'More than five hundred dollars!" Arthur would say, over and over again. "More than five hundred dollars, and we haven't five hundred cents!"

By degrees, however, the boys had managed to reduce the sum total somewhat. The wagon, they thought, might be taken out of the list. So might one of the horses, if Old Jim could be put instead. Then the sixty dollars for harness could be brought down to less than half that amount. They could make some of the old harness on the farm available—with their father's consent. They could take less pork and more bacon.

"I hate pork, anyhow," said Barnard, who had worked one season of haying with a neighbor, and had been fed on fried pork and hot bread three times a day for five weeks.

"But we can't have hams and shoulders," objected Arthur. "Don't they cost a good deal?"

"Side meat's the thing, Arty. No bones in it; easy to carry, and cheap. Nine cents a pound; and we've got a lot in the smoke-house, you know, that perhaps father will let us have some from."

"And this fellow has got down bacon at eleven cents a pound!" said Arthur, with great disdain. "And what he should put in 'Sunday small stores' at ten dollars for, is more than I know. What are 'Sunday small stores,' anyhow?"

"Ho, you goose!—those are 'sundry small stores.' You've made an *a* out of an *r*; that's all. 'Sunday small stores!' Well, that's a good one! He's guessed at the lot: and I guess it's high for a little salt, spice, and such knick-knacks. Besides, there's five dollars for medicine. Who's going to be sick on the Plains, I'd like to know?"

A multitude of such discussions as these, with much contriving and figuring, put the young emigrants where they could see their way clear to an outfit—if they had only one hundred and fifty dollars in cash. That was a big sum; and, even with this, they had calculated

on obtaining permission to take from the farm many things which were needed.

The boys studied over the ways and means of getting to California with real enjoyment. Hubert, the big brother, who was employed in a store in town, and came home on Sundays, declared that Arthur carried the printed slip from the *Plowman* to bed with him. Nevertheless, the whole family joined in the debate over the propriety of taking corn-meal on such a long journey, or the cost of extra boots and clothing for the travelers, with a glow of satisfaction. It was a novelty, and, though none but Barney and Arthur really thought anything would come of it, all the boys discussed the route, outfit, and dangers of the way at morning, noon, and night.

They made out new lists of things indispensable for the trip, and fingered these with a certain sort of fascination for the items and figures which was quite satisfactory. As Sam said one day, they had the fun of talking about it, even if nobody should go.

The careworn mother looked on and listened. She could not contentedly think of these dear young fledglings of hers flying so far away from the home nest. There were dreadful tales of Indians on the way, disease, and death, and violence and crime in the gold diggings. What would become of her boys, alone and unfriended, in that rude country, even if they should

ever reach it? She looked at Arthur's golden head, deep in the mysteries of the cookery-book, which he was studying for future use; and she sighed and smiled together. Could she trust her boy to the chances of a roving life on the Plains? Would he find there the romance and fun which he anticipated?

"If I was only in a story-book now, I should find a wallet in the road with one hundred and fifty dollars in it."

Arthur had said this to himself a great many times. This time as he lay at full length on top of the hill behind the house, looking off down the valley of the Rock, he built once more his golden dream. Beyond the brown, newly-plowed fields, suggesting only hard work; beyond the tall cottonwoods that bordered the stream, and beyond the pale blue line where the valley of the Rock River melted into the sky, was the promised land. So far away it was! Yet he could see, he thought, the gay caravans pressing on to the golden shores of the Pacific. There were long trains of brave men with wagons, horses, and arms. There were the rolling prairies dotted with buffalo, deer, and strange game. The red man lurked by the river, but fled away to the snow-capped mountains as the white conqueror came on apace. The grand Rocky Mountains, whose devious line he had painfully studied on his school-map, rose majestically on the horizon, lying like clouds against the sky.

How mean and narrow the little farm below him looked! How small the valley and how wearisome the plowed fields! He remembered that his back had ached with the planting of that ten-acre lot; and he remembered, too, how his father had said that little boys' backs never ached; that little boys thought their backs ached, but they didn't. Arthur turned his eyes westward again with a vague and restless longing. Surely, there was a place for him somewhere outside the narrow valley, where he could make a name, see the world, and learn something besides plowing, sowing, harvesting, and saving.

"One hundred and fifty dollars," he murmured once more, as his eyes fell on Hiram Fender, slowly plodding his way through the tall grass below the hill. "Oh, Hi!" called Arthur, and Hiram, shading his eyes from the sinking sun, looked up where Arthur lay on the ledge. Everybody liked the cheery Arthur; and Hi Fender climbed the hill with "Well, now, youngster, what's up?"

"Nothing, only Barney wanted me to ask you, whenever I saw you, what you'd take for that white mare of yours. She is yours, isn't she?"

"Well, yes, I allow she's mine. Dad said he'd gin her to me on my twenty-first birthday, and that was April, the twenty-one."

"What'll you take for her?"

"Don't want to sell. Besides, what d'ye want her for?"

"To go to California with."

"Be you fellers going to Californy?"

"Yes, if we can get up an outfit."

Hiram Fender looked languidly over the glowing landscape. He was a "slow-molded chap," Farmer Stevens said; and he never was excited. But the sun seemed to burn in his eyes as he said: "Will you take a fellow along?"

"Who? You?"

"Sartin, sartin; I've been a-thinkin' it over, and I'll go if you fellers go."

Arthur jumped up, swung his ragged hat two or three times, and said: "Good for you, Hi! and the list is made out for four!"

Hiram looked on him with a mild query expressed on his freckled face, and Arthur took out of his pocket the well-worn list for the outfit and read: "The following list is calculated for four persons, making a four months' trip from the Mississippi to the gold diggings."

Hiram looked at it and said: "Five hundred and twenty-three dollars! Phew!"

Hiram's father was a thrifty Illinois farmer. The neighbors said he was "forehanded," but he had brought up his boys to look at least twice at a dollar before spending it; therefore, when Hiram looked at

the sum total of the list, he said "Phew!" with an expression of great dismay.

"But," cried Arthur, "it is for four persons, and we have figured it down so that we only want one hundred and fifty dollars. Can't you think of some other fellow that would go? Then we should have a party of four?"

"I allow that Tom might go. He wants to go to Californy powerful bad; but I ain't right sure that dad'll let him."

Now, Tom was Hiram's younger brother and Arthur's particular aversion. So Arthur dubiously said: "Wouldn't Bill go?"

"Bill!" repeated Hiram, with great disgust. "Bill hasn't got spunk enough to go across the Mississippi. Why, he's that scared of Injuns that he gets up in the middle of the night, dreaming like enough, and yelling 'Injuns! Injuns!' He was scart by a squaw when he was a baby, and he goes on like mad whenever he hears 'em mentioned."

Arthur laughed. "And he's older than you, Hi?"

"Yes, Bill's the oldest of the family. But there's little Tom, now. Ain't he peart, though? He can yoke up a pair of young steers, or shuck a bushel of corn equal to any grown man about these parts. And he's only fifteen come harvest, too! He's just afraid of nothing. He'll go fast enough."

"That is if your father will let him."

"Yes, if dad'll let him. And we can put in my white mare agin your Old Jim. But my white mare will kick your Old Jim all to pieces, I allow," and Hiram grinned at what he thought was the great contrast between the two horses.

Arthur was very much elated at the prospect of reinforcements to the party, though he could not regard Tom Fender as a desirable recruit. Tom was an awkward, loutish lad, disposed to rough ways, and holding very contemptuous views of the manners of the Stevens family, whom he called "stuck-up Boston folks." Arthur had felt obliged to challenge Tom to open combat on one occasion, when that young gentleman, secure behind Old Fender's corn-crib, bawled out "mackerel-catchers!" at Arthur and his brothers as they were jogging along to church one Sunday morning. The consequence was that both boys wore black-and-blue eyes after that encounter, and suffered some family discipline besides. They had since been on very distant terms of acquaintance.

"I don't care. Hi Fender is a downright good fellow," said Arthur, when Barnard opened his eyes at the information that the two Fender boys might be secured for their party.

"Yes, but how about Tom?"

Arthur hesitated. "Well, I want to get off across the

Plains. That's a fact. I think I could get along with Tom, if you can. He is real smart with cattle and horses, you know."

"Oh, I don't care for Tom," said Barnard disdainfully. "He's only a little chap, smaller than you, and he won't worry me. Besides, his brother Hi is a mighty good fellow, even if he is rough. He is pretty close, I know, but we sha'n't quarrel about that. We've all got to be economical, if we are to get across to California."

So it was agreed, and when word came up the road that Mr. Fender had consented that his boys should go, there was great excitement in the Stevens house. It really seemed as if the boys were going to California. They had insensibly glided into the whole arrangement without taking any family vote on it. Neither father nor mother had once consented or refused that the boys should go with so much of an outfit as they might pick up.

"Oh, father," said Mrs. Stevens, "it is heart-breaking to think of those boys going off alone into the wilderness. I'm sure I shall never see them again, if they go."

"Well, mother, I should like to keep them on the place; but they are getting restive, and I don't much blame them. They've got the gold fever pretty bad; and if I was as young as they I don't know but what I'd

go myself. It's pretty hard pickings here." Farmer Stevens had a roving disposition, which he had not quite outgrown.

"But," remonstrated the mother, "they haven't money enough to give them a good outfit. It would be a frightful thing to let those thoughtless boys go out on the great Plains without food and other things sufficient to take them through."

"Now, mother, I've been thinking that we might sell the wood off the lower half of the wood-lot down by the marsh. Page has offered me one hundred dollars for the cut. That, with what the Fenders put in and what we have on the place, would give the boys a tolerable fit-out."

That wood-lot was the special pride of the family. "Timber," as every species of tree was called in those parts, was scarce. Wood was dear, and in some seasons the prairie farmers used corn for fuel, it was so much cheaper than wood; and it cost a great deal to get the grain to market. It was a great sacrifice to cut down those maples and sell them for fire-wood. But Farmer Stevens, poring over maps, estimates of provisions, and California news, with his boys, had been secretly fired with the gold fever. He could not go; but he was willing to give up the standing timber in order that Barnard and Arthur should have a good outfit. It cost him a struggle. But, old as he was, he

sympathized with the boys in their adventurous ambition. He was not so sanguine about the gold in California holding out long. But it was there now. He had seen and handled Josh Gates's pile of dust; and Solomon Bookstaver, who went to the Columbia River five years before, had just come back from California and had fired the entire population of Lee Centre with his display of golden nuggets, or *chispas*, as Sol called them.

When the father's determination to sell the wood off his wood-lot was made known the next day, in family council, Barnard's face glowed, and Sam said: "Well, I swan to man!" Arthur dashed out by the back door, turned five or six "flip-flaps" to calm himself, came back, and, putting his arm about his father's neck, whispered in his ear: "You are the best old father a boy ever had!"

So it was finally settled that the boys should go to California, across the Plains, the party consisting of Barnard and Arthur Stevens, and Hiram and Thomas Fender.

Great were the preparations. The provisions available on the two farms were laid under contribution. The tent, a marvel of comfort and lightness, was made and set up before the house, to the great curiosity of the passing neighbors, who stopped their teams and asked: "Gwine to Californy?"

In those days groceries and clothing were cheaper than now, and, with the cash which the party had collected, they laid in a very fair supply, and had a little money left to use when absolutely necessary on the journey. The young fellows hugely enjoyed getting ready. The woolen shirts and jean overalls, wide hats and leather belts, which were to be their uniform, were put on with solid satisfaction. Tom swaggered around with a seven-barreled Colt's revolver, nearly as big as himself, slung on his hip. Those delightful days of packing flew quickly. The wagon was crammed full to the ash bows which supported the canvas cover. A sheet-iron camp-stove was tied on behind. Water-pail and tar-bucket dangled underneath. Thus equipped, one fine May morning the gold-hunters drove away. Old Jim and White Jenny trotted gayly down the road, their faces turned towards the West.

Father and mother stood at the gate. Hi Fender drove the wagon, the rest of the party trudging along by the side. Hubert, who had come over from town to see the departure, with Sam and Oliver, accompanied the young adventurers to the top of the divide, where they left them.

And so they were off. Behind them was home. Before them an unknown sea of privation, danger, want, and adventure. The wagon disappeared over the ridge. The boys were gone.

CHAPTER III

CAMPING OUT

Iowa was not a thickly settled State in those days, and a journey across it was not so very different from the progress of a caravan across the continent. But there were farm-houses along the road where the emigrants could procure milk, fresh vegetables, and bread. They had little money, and only bought such things as would help them to economize their stock of provisions. By and by they would be out of the reach of all other supplies. Camping out was, at first, great fun. Their tent was new, fresh, and clean. It was big enough for six people, and a man could stand upright in the middle, where the ridge-pole sustained the roof. This roof was in the shape of the letter V turned upside down, thus: Λ. But about two feet from the ground the canvas came straight down and was fastened by wooden pins driven in. The main body of the tent was kept up by ropes, or stays, secured at the lower edge of the roof and stretched out to large wooden pins driven into the ground two or three feet off. Then, guy ropes, extending from each end of the ridge-

pole and made fast to other stakes, kept the whole concern steady when the wind blew. So the house of this migrating party was dry and strong enough for most occasions, and it was easily packed in a small space. When the tent was set up at the end of a day's march, the two upright poles were held up, with the ridge-pole laid on top and secured at each end by an iron pin, which passed through a hole at each end of the pole. Two boys held this frail house-frame together while another threw the canvas over it and fastened it in two or three places to keep it from tumbling over. Then all hands stretched out the ropes, pinned the cloth at the bottom, and, in a few minutes, the house was ready for the night. While travelling, the tent, with its ropes and pins, was stuffed into a stout sack. The door had no hinges, nor name-plate, nor door-bell; it was a slit in the canvas and was fastened with strings, instead of lock and key. Under shelter of this the emigrants spread their blankets and buffalo-robes, and slept soundly and well.

But the cooking was a dreadful burden. Barnard had taken some lessons in bread-making from his mother before starting, and he made the first batch of bread. No, it was not exactly bread, either. First he carefully put some flour, salt, and yeast powder into a pan and mixed them thoroughly with a big spoon, the others looking on with admiration. Then he

poured in boiling water until he had a thick paste, which he mixed round and round as before. It was fearfully sticky, but Barney bravely put his hands into it and attempted to mould the mass into biscuits. It would not be moulded; such obstinate dough was never before seen. When poor Barney tried to pick it off from one hand it would stick to another. He rubbed more flour in to make it dryer, and then the lumps of dough all wasted away into "chicken feed," as Hiram satirically called it, and there was no consistence to it, and when they added water to it the stuff became again just like glue.

"You want to pat the cakes round and round in your hands, so," said Arthur. "That's the way mother does."

"Pat 'em yourself, if you know so much about it," said Barnard angrily; and he sat down in the grass, and tried to scratch his bothered head with his elbows, his hands being helpless wads of dough. Arthur, rolling up his sleeves, dipped into the pan and succeeded in sticking his fingers together so fast that each hand looked like a very big and very badly shaped duck's foot—web-fingered, in fact.

"Hang the bread!" he exclaimed; and the rest of the family rolled over in the grass roaring at the comical figure he cut. He was daubed with dough up to the elbows and unable to use his hands; a mosquito had

lighted on his face, and, involuntarily slapping at him, Arthur had left a huge blotch of paste on his forehead, completely closing his left eye. Poor Arthur rested his helpless paws on the edge of the pan and said: "I give it up."

"Oh, dump her into the baking-pan and let her flicker!" said Hiram, as soon as he could get his breath again. "We don't care for biscuits; it's the bread we want. This is camping out, boys, you know."

So the mass was tumbled into the baking-pan and put into the oven of their handy little sheet-iron camp-stove. For a table they had a wide, short piece of pine board, which, laid across a couple of mining-pans, turned bottom up, answered as well as "real mahogany," as Arthur said. On this occasion, however, the tin plates and cups, the smoking coffee-pot, and even the fried meat, were on the board long before that obstinate bread showed signs of being done. It would not rise up light "like mother's," and when a straw was run cautiously into it the inside seemed as raw as ever. An hour's baking seemed to make no impression on it, and the boys finally supplied its place with dry crackers and supped as merrily as if they had not made their first great failure.

They tried to throw away the provoking mess of dough that would not bake, but it stuck in the pan as obstinately as it had refused to be cooked. They

scraped away at it with all sorts of tools, but the stuff, which now resembled a small bed of mortar, adhered to the pan with determination.

"Did you grease that pan?" demanded Arthur.

"No," said Barney, with a sudden flush. "Who ever heard of such a thing?"

There was another shout of laughter, for everybody at once recollected that the pan should have had flour, or some kind of grease, put in it to keep the dough from sticking. While they laughed, a farm-wagon, in which rode an old man and a young woman, came jogging along the road by which they were camped. The girl wore a faded red calico frock which hung straight down from her waist to her bare brown feet. A huge gingham sun-bonnet with a cape protected her head and shoulders.

Arthur ran down to the edge of the road and heard the old man say: "Them's Californy emigrants." It was the first time the boy had ever heard himself called an emigrant, and he did not like it. But suddenly remembering that he was one, he checked his rising glow of indignation and said: "Say, miss, will you tell us what's the matter with this bread?"

The girl looked at her father, who looked at the queer group by the tent, then at Arthur's flushed and honest face, and said: "Go, Nance." So Nance, declining Arthur's proffered hand, leaped to the ground, and,

wading through the grass, went up and cast a critical glance at the objectionable dough.

"How d'ye make this yere?" she asked, pointing her elbow at the bread. Barnard described the process by which he had compounded that famous preparation of flour and other things.

"What sort of water did you put into it?" she next demanded.

"Why, good spring water, of course!" was the reply.

"Cold or hot?"

"Oh, boiling hot, to be sure."

The girl suddenly clasped her hands to her stomach, sat down in the grass and doubled herself up like a jackknife. Then, sitting up again, she pushed back her sun-bonnet, and, as if addressing herself to the camp-stove, she said:

"My goodness gracious me! if these ornery fellers haven't been and gone and scalded their flour! Oh, my! Oh, my! I'm just fit to bust!" And she doubled herself up again.

"So we should not have scalded the bread, Miss Sun-bonnet, should we?" asked Barnard, who felt ridiculed and was somewhat nettled.

The girl wiped her eyes on her sleeve and said: "Bread! it ain't bread; it's flour paste."

Recovering herself, Nance good-naturedly explained that cold water or milk should be used in mixing the

flour; and, adding some other general instructions, she strode off through the grass to the wagon. As she climbed up and rode away the boys saw her double herself up once more, and they thought she said: "Scalded his flour, the ornery critter!"

Though this was a severe lesson in housekeeping, it was not the only one of their mortifying failures. Even when they learned to make bread with cold water, it was not until they had spoiled much good flour that they were able to make bread that was even eatable. And it was not in Iowa that they succeeded well enough to satisfy themselves. After they had crossed the Missouri, long after, and were well out in Nebraska, Arthur made the first bread of which the others proudly said that it was "good enough for anybody."

Cooking beans was another perplexity. They baked them dry with a piece of pork, and when they were "done," they rolled out of the baking kettle like gravel stones, harder than when they went into it. Then, when they discovered that the beans should have been soaked and boiled, or parboiled, before baking, they took two quarts and soaked and boiled them. The beans swelled and swelled until the big camp kettle overflowed. They were put into other dishes, but would not stop swelling, and before those beans were ready to bake every dish in camp was full and overflowing. A satirical wood-chopper, loafing up to their

"BREAD! IT AIN'T BREAD; IT'S FLOUR PASTE"

camp in the midst of the crisis, inquisitively asked: "Be you fellows peddlin' beans across to Californy?"

But, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, the boys began to enjoy themselves very much. Some days it was very hot and tedious tramping along in the dusty road, especially when they reflected that they were so far from the end of their journey. Even though days of travel were behind them, before them the road stretched out for more than a thousand miles. They seemed to have been on the journey a good while, but they knew that months must pass before they could reach the end of it. "This is awful slow work," Barney would say when they reckoned up the day's progress. "Only twenty-one miles to-day, and a couple of thousand, more or less, to get over."

Hiram, however, a patient and plodding fellow, "allowed" that it took so many steps less for next day's journey, because those of to-day had been taken, one by one. And Arthur used to look back at their camping-place when they had moved on for an hour or so, and blithely say: "Now I am two miles nearer California than I was this morning."

"Two miles ain't much, especially when a chap has got the dishes to wash at the end of every twenty miles," says Tom, surlily. Washing dishes was a very disagreeable part of camp duty. It was a continual subject of contention. Nobody wanted to wash dishes.

To be sure, the whole camp equipage did not amount to more than four or five tin plates and as many cups and knives and forks. An active kitchen-maid would have disposed of the whole lot in a few minutes. But the boys were not kitchen-maids, and, what was more, they would not appear as though they were. Hiram thought that as long as he was responsible for fire-wood and water, dish-washing should not be included in his duties. Barnard usually drove the team, and had general charge of that important branch of the service. Tom and Arthur attended to pitching the tent at night, unloading the wagon of things needed during camping time, and taking down the tent, packing up, and collecting camp furniture in the morning preparatory to a start. All hands, with equal unsuccess, tried the cooking; and all hands, though ready to find fault with each other's cooking, declared that they would do anything but cook—unless it was to wash dishes.

"Perhaps you had better hire a girl to go along and wash dishes, Arty," said Barnard reproachfully.

"I don't care, Barney; I didn't ship to wash dishes, and I won't; so there," was Arthur's invariable reply, which Barnard as invariably met with "Who did?"

Obviously nobody did. So the dishes went unwashed, sometimes for days together. One morning, Hiram, taking up his plate, said: "I wonder what was in this yere plate last? There's bacon fat and corn-

dodger crumbs, boiled rice, molasses and I allow that there gray streak in that nor'-nor'-west corner is chicken. Tell yer what, boys, I don't allow that I'm agoin' to drive horses, chop wood, or lug water for fellers that won't wash dishes for decency's sake. I'm willin' to do my share of the cookin', turn and turn about. You two boys ought to wash the dishes regular. I'm the oldest feller in this yere camp, and if you, Tom and Arthur, don't find some way of doin' up those yere dishes between ye, before we git to the Bluffs, ye may as well make up yer minds to go back from there."

This was a long speech from Hiram, who always meant what he said. Barnard supported him in this decision; and the younger boys, though feeling very much "put upon," agreed to take turns at playing house-maid.

The first experiment was attended by a serious disaster. They drew lots for the first week's duty, and Arthur was "stuck," as he expressed it, for the service. Sitting somewhat morosely on the ground, one evening, at work on this unwelcome job of dish-washing, he turned the only crockery plate of the establishment about in his hands, wiping it and scolding to himself. Tom, who was not a little elated that he was exempt from this service, at least for one week, stood by, and, aggravatingly pointing with his foot at the plate, said:

"Be careful of that yere crockery, Arty, it's Hi's favorite dish. He'll dress ye down if ye smash it."

Arthur, with a gust of rage, cracked Tom over his toe with the plate, breaking it into pieces.

"There, now! I——"

But before Tom could say any further, Hiram, who had watched the whole proceeding, seized both boys by the collar and hustled them toward a creek which flowed near camp.

"Where are you going with those boys?" shouted Barnard, amazed and laughing as he saw stout Hiram wrestling with the two squirming boys.

"I'm going to drown 'em, like I would a pair of quarrelsome cats," said Hiram, manfully struggling with the youngsters.

"No you don't, though," said Tom, dexterously twisting one of his legs in between Hiram's feet. The young man staggered a little, and, in his effort to save himself from falling into the creek, let both boys go loose. They stood a little way off, looking defiantly at each other and at Hiram.

"Your family government does not seem to work well," said Barnard. "I guess we'll have to send the boys back from Council Bluffs. They never'll go through this way."

Arthur, who still held in his hand a bit of the plate that had been the innocent cause of this outburst, said:

"Well, Tom pestered me; but I'm willing to try it again. Give us a fair trial, Barney."

Tom was sulky, but admitted that he should not have provoked Arthur.

"Tom, I'll tell ye what I'll do with *you*," said Hiram. "If ye don't behave yerself, I'll take away yer revolver and put you on the first boat bound down, after we get to the Bluffs."

"That will be binding him over to keep the peace," said Barnard.

"No," added Arthur, opening his hand and showing, with a blush, the fragment of Hiram's pet plate, "I'm going to keep the piece."

And he did.

CHAPTER IV

"THE JUMPING-OFF PLACE"

A CITY of tents covered the flat banks of the Missouri, below Council Bluffs, when our party reached the river. In those days Council Bluffs was a scattered and rough looking town, about four miles from the Missouri River; and, where its edges were frayed out toward the south, was a long, level strip of land, extending to the broad sweep of the stream. Westward, this plain was dotted with thousands of cattle, belonging to emigrants; and in that part of the plain nearest the town were the carts and wagons of those whose faces were now turned toward California. It was a novel sight. Here were men mending wagons, cooking in the open air, repairing their tents or clothes, trading off some part of their outfit, or otherwise making ready for the final start across the Plains.

Looking across the flat bottom land, Arthur could barely catch a glimpse of the Big Muddy, as the people called the Missouri River. A fringe of low trees showed where the stream flowed by; and occasionally a huge three-story steamboat went gliding down in the distance, looking exactly as if it were moving

through the meadows. Beyond, the western side of the river was somewhat bluffy and broken. A few wooden shanties were grouped about the ferry landing, a huge scow being the means of transit. The ferry was a primitive affair, guided by a rope stretched across the stream. On one eminence stood a weather-beaten structure, partially boarded over. This was designed to be the capitol when the country should be erected into the Territory of Nebraska. The groups of shanties scattered about over the hills had no name. Omaha has since arisen on that site. Then, however, the whole country was one of great expectations.

With eyes wide open, scanning the curious sights on every side, the boys drove their team down the river road, in search of a good camping-place. Their experience in traveling through Iowa had taught them that they must find a dry, smooth spot for their tent, water for the camp, and grass for the horses. On the edge of this strange city of tents they found all of these, and there they encamped.

But they were not allowed to do this unnoticed. Although people were continually going and coming, there were enough idle fellows to watch the newcomers and make remarks upon them. "Here's more candidates for California fortunes." "Going to the Pacific with that raw-boned hoss?" "Oh, get out of that wagon and walk to the diggins." "What are you

going to do with that gold-pan?" "Say, sonny, does yer mammy know you're out?" These were some of the rude salutations which greeted the party as they drove sturdily down through the city of tents.

Arthur's eyes snapped a little, and his cheeks burned; but Hiram, perched in the wagon, flung back the rude observations with cheerful readiness. One kindly-faced man, who walked along beside the boys, said:

"You mustn't mind these chaps; they're rough, but good-natured; and if you should happen to get into difficulty, they would help you readily enough."

Their new acquaintance showed them where parties from various parts of the Western States were encamped; and they pitched their tent near that of some men from Hancock County, Illinois, and soon made themselves at home.

They felt that they had reached "the jumping-off place." Beyond, across the river, was nothing but that vast unbroken stretch of country which used to be laid down in the school maps as "Unexplored Regions." Even now it was unexplored except by a few people who had gone over to Oregon, Utah, or California. Contradictory reports about the value of the gold diggings were coming into this canvas city of emigrants. The very day that they arrived there ran a rumor through the camp that two men had just come in from California with very discouraging news. It

was said that they had come through in twenty-eight days, running their mules all the way; had had narrow escapes from Indians, and had got so far back on their way to "the States," as everybody called the country east of the Missouri.

After the boys had settled their camp for the night, they went out and hunted up these bearers of ill tidings. Pressing into a little knot of men near the camp of some New Englanders, who had fitted out at Council Bluffs, they saw a rough, bearded, ragged, and seedy-looking man, sitting on a wagon-tongue. He was smoking a short pipe with great enjoyment, and occasionally he dropped a word by way of answer to the questions that were showered upon him.

"Gold! no!" he replied, with great scorn, "thar's no gold in the hull country. How do I know? Why, I war thar a week; that's how I know."

"Where were you?" asked one of the bystanders.

"I was on the Yuba, jest whar it jines into the American. That's whar I war."

"But I didn't know the Yuba emptied into the American; the Yuba is further north," said Barnard impulsively and before he thought.

"Been thar?" growled the returned Californian.

"No," said Barnard, with a blush.

"Wal, I have, you bet yer," rejoined the other. "And it's no use o' yer talkin', men; I have mined it

more nor a week in them diggins; never got so much as a color."

"Did you hear of anybody who did find gold?" somebody asked.

"Here and thar war a man who said as how he had seed some other feller as had seed another who had heerd tell on some other chap as had found somethin' that looked like gold. I don't put no trust into any on 'em."

"You look as if you'd had a hard time," said a sympathizing visitor.

"Misery in my bones, wust way; I ain't been so powerful bad in my life afore. Fever 'n ager wuss than in Arkansaw. You bet yer."

"Why didn't you keep on down the Yuba, prospecting?"

"Keep on?" replied the veteran, with infinite scorn. "We war nigh out of grub. No gold in sight. We'd rastled with our luck long enough, me and my pard. So we jist lit out'n that 'tween two days. Powerful glad we are to be yar, too, you bet yer."

"You look it," said one of the emigrants, who seemed to regard this dampening report as a sort of personal injury.

Younkins, for this was the name of the returned prospector, told the same story all through the camps. No gold in California, but much sickness; cholera, fever

and ague, and a plenty of men glad to get away, if they could only find the means to travel with. Some of the emigrants did not believe these reports. Some said: "Oh, these chaps are discouraging emigration to the diggins. They want it all themselves. They can't fool us that way." But others were downright discouraged.

A day or two after, four men crossed the river from the Nebraska side, driving an ox-team with a shabby wagon. They had gone as far west as Fort Laramie, where they heard bad news and had turned back. The boys sought out this party, and heard their story. They had lost a comrade, who had died on the way to Laramie. They were gloomy, disheartened, and out of spirits. They overtook people coming back. Some had been through to California; or they said they had. Others had turned their faces homeward after hearing the reports of others.

This bad news had its effect in the camps. "The mines have given out," was the cry around many of the camp-fires; and not a few wagons were packed up, or sold out at auction, and the disheartened owners returned to "the States," out of pocket as well as out of spirits. In a few days outfits were to be had for low prices. The weekly newspaper at Council Bluffs vainly tried to keep up the excitement. Reports from California were discouraging. If there ever had been

any gold there, it was exhausted. It was useless to say that there never was any of the precious stuff found in the mines. Many of the emigrants had seen some that had been brought to their own homes. Arthur and Barney had touched and handled Gates' golden ore. But the mines had given out, and that was the end of the matter.

"I don't believe any such yarn," said Barnard, stoutly. "I don't want to influence the rest of you boys; but I'm going through. For one, I shall not turn back."

"Nor I!" said Arthur, with a burst of enthusiasm.

"Nor I," added Tom.

"It's Californy or bust, with me," said Hiram, sententiously.

So they were agreed.

But things looked rather blue at times; and when those who had turned back drove slowly up the road and disappeared among the bluffs, Arthur looked after them with some misgivings, and with a touch of homesickness in his heart. Then he turned his eyes westward where the sun dipped below the western hills. As, at one glance, he saw the long trail stretching over the unknown land, it was a mysterious and untried way. The boy hesitated only for a moment, and stretching out his arms toward the setting sun, said to himself, "I'm bound to go through!"

After all, however, there were very few who turned back, compared with the number remaining at the Bluffs. And every steamboat that came up the river brought fresh recruits from the towns and cities below. These had only part of their outfit with them; some of them at once bought out the entire equipment of those who were returning, and so stepped into possession of all that was needed to take them through. In a few days the city of tents grew a great deal; and, on the western side of the Missouri, where the bottom land spread out, as on the Iowa side, there was a considerable encampment. These, like the camps across the river, were changing all the while. Every day a train of wagons would roll out over the hills, bound for California at last; and new additions were immediately made. This was the place where emigrants to California found what was yet to be added to their equipment. Supplies were plenty, and sold at reasonable prices. People who, like our boys, had traveled across the country by team had used some of their provisions before reaching the Bluffs; and their brief experience in camping out and traveling showed them where their equipments were imperfect. Council Bluffs was a busy place; everybody had something to sell; and the citizens of that thriving town strolled among the canvas tents of the emigrants with calm satisfaction.

There was much hunting to and fro for people who

had come across the country by their comrades who had followed after by the speedier transit of railroad and steamboat. Some of these parties were never made up again. It often happened that those who arrived first grew tired of waiting for those who were to come after. Although there was much delay at the Bluffs, everybody was feverish and excited. If they were going on to the land of gold, they were in a hurry to start. If they had decided to return, they had no time to waste at the river. So little companies broke up, some going on and some turning back. Friends, neighbors and families were thus dispersed, never to meet again. And, wandering around from camp to camp, were those who expected to find their comrades, but who, too often, found that they had gone on before. Some of these belated ones were disheartened, and went no farther; but most of them joined themselves to other parties and so pushed on to California.

Our boys began to think that their two-horse team was hardly heavy enough to draw their wagon across the continent. They saw that most people had at least two spare horses; and many more oxen than horses were used by the emigrants.

"Oxen is the things, I allow, after all, boys," said Hiram, who had studied the subject carefully while coming through Iowa. "Just suppose one of these

hosses should up and die; where'd ye be then? We'd have to haul through with one hoss."

"But suppose we were chased by Indians," remonstrated Arthur. "We couldn't get away with oxen, could we?"

"Indians! pshaw!" said Hiram, "there ain't no Indians, so far as heerd from. And if there were, hosses won't save us, you may bet on that."

"We might trade off our horses for oxen," said Barnard, "but we couldn't expect to get two yoke of oxen for a pair of horses; and unless we had two yoke we should be no better off than we are now."

"Cattle are cheap," explained Hiram. "We can buy a yoke for fifty or sixty dollars. Old Jim is worth that much money, and my Jenny could sell for more than the cost of another yoke. The farmers around here are bringing in their cattle."

"Golly! how it rains," broke in Tom, who had been trying to keep the beating current out of the tent. The water flowed in under the edge of the canvas from the sloping ground in the rear. Arthur jumped up in consternation. He had been sitting in a little pool of water.

"All hands out to dig trenches," shouted Barnard. The night was pitch dark, and the boys seized their lantern, shovels and ax and sallied out to dig a narrow ditch about the tent. The water poured into this,

and so was carried off on each side, and their canvas-house stood on a little island of its own. But the rain fell in torrents, and the tent flapped wildly in the wind.

"Tell you what, fellers," said Hiram, shaking the water from him, as they crouched inside again, "this ain't what it's cracked up to be. Camping in a rain-storm ain't great fun; hey, Arty?"

Arthur was just going to say that they might be worse off before they got across the Plains, when a pair of very thin hands were thrust in at the opening of the tent, now tied together for the night, and a thin voice said: "Please may I come in?"

"Sartin, sartin," said Hiram, heartily. "Walk in and make yourself to hum, whosumever you be."

Arthur unfastened the tent curtain, and a boyish figure, slender and woe-begone, struggled into the group.

The stranger might have been about thirteen years old. He looked as if he had lived about forty years. He wore a pair of trousers made of striped jean, resembling bed-ticking; and his jacket of linsey-woolsey homespun, and dyed with butternut juice, was much too short at the wrists. His face was pale, but sweet and pleasant, and he had mild blue eyes. Under his arm he carried a large bundle, and on his head he wore a very seedy coon-skin cap, wet and dripping with the rain. He put his bundle carefully on the ground, and

tied the tent together again; then, turning about, he surveyed the little party in the tent with mild inquiry, but without a word.

"What mought yer name be?" asked Hiram, when nobody else had broken silence.

"Johnny."

Hiram paused. He felt that the boy's name was not, after all, of much consequence to anybody; but to ask for it was one way to begin a conversation. And he had not got far. "Johnny" was rather vague.

"Johnny what?" spoke up Tom.

"That's all. Only just Johnny," was the reply.

"Oh, don't bother the boy about his name," broke in Barnard. "Where are your folks? Are you going to California?"

"Yes, I'm going to Californy; and I don't know where my folks are. Perhaps you've seen 'em, sir. There's a tall one with red hair, and a short one with harelip, and another one with a game leg. Oh, sir, haven't you seen 'em nowhere?" and the poor boy's eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

"A game leg?" repeated Hiram. "Boys, don't you remember that thar mean skunk as stole Josh Davis's ox-chain over on the west side? He mought have been the chap. Did he wear a red shirt, with a blue handkercher around his neck?" he asked of Johnny.

"Yes," said the boy; "and his name was Bunce—

Bill Bunce—and we are from Vermillion County, Illinois."

"I allow he and his pardners have gone on ahead," said Hiram.

"I was over on the Omaha side when they drove out," added Tom, and they had a big yaller dog named Pete with them. Golly! but that dog was a masterhand to hunt chipmunks! How he would——"

"Oh, you talk too much with your mouth," interrupted Hiram, impatiently. Johnny showed signs of breaking into tears. He sat down and told his story. He had lived in Vermillion County with a man who was called a doctor, he said. Evidently he had been hardly used, and had never known father or mother. A drudge in a country doctor's house, he had been kept in ignorance of the world outside, of his own friends, and of his father and mother. He had never even been told his own name. How did he get here? That was simple enough. Three or four of the doctor's neighbors were going to California. They offered to take the boy along. He was too glad to get away from the brutal and quick-tempered doctor, to wait for a second hint. They had journeyed on together to Quincy, on the Mississippi, where the men left Johnny to follow them by steamer, while they went "another way," as they said. They promised to write to him when to start for Council Bluffs. He waited several weeks at

the miserable little boarding-house where they had lodged him. Alarmed at the long delay, he had started off by himself, and here he was.

"Probably their letters miscarried," said Arthur, with pity in his eyes.

"More likely they never wrote," added his wiser brother.

The youngster looked distressed, but spoke up cheerfully: "Perhaps they haven't gone. They said they would wait here for me."

But Hiram was sure about "the man with the game leg"; he was not positive as to the others. Both Arthur and Tom remembered the lame man with the big yellow dog, especially the dog; and nobody was sure whether the tall man with him had red hair.

"Well, you can bunk down with us to-night," said Hiram, "and in the morning we'll take a hunt through the camps, and if your fellows haven't lighted out, we'll find 'em."

The next morning broke fair and bright. The rain had ceased in the night and great drops were shining on the grass and on the bushes that bordered the plain. With a bound of exhilaration, Arthur sprang out of his damp blankets and began to make ready for breakfast. Johnny crept out into the sunshine, and, having followed Arthur's example by taking a wash from the tin wash-hand basin that was produced from the wagon,

he sat watching the preparations about the camp-stove.

"May I stay to breakfast with you?" he asked. "I've got money enough to pay for it."

"I don't know," said Arthur, doubtfully. "You will have to ask Barney. Well, yes, you shall stop too," he added, as he saw the boy's face fall. You shall have my breakfast anyhow."

"But I can pay for it. I've got some money sewed into my jacket."

"How much?" demanded Tom, who was splitting up a fence-rail for fire-wood.

"Eighty dollars," said Johnny, simply.

"Jerusalem crickets!" exclaimed Tom. "Where did you get so much?"

"Dr. Jenness gave it to me before I left. He said it was mine, and that he had been keeping it for me."

Before any more talk could be made, a bright-faced, handsome young fellow, with a citified and jaunty air, walked up to the group and asked: "Can you tell me where I can find the Lee County boys, as they call them?"

"That's us," said Tom, with a good-natured grin.

"Well, I'm in luck; and where's the captain?"

Barnard, who was coming out of the tent with an armful of bedding, said: "We have no captain. What's your will?"

"I hear you want a yoke of cattle. I have a yoke which I should like to turn in as part of my outfit, if you will take another partner. I'm going through."

Barnard eyed him suspiciously, and said: "Where from?"

"Well, I'm from Boston last; born in Vermont, though; have been in the dry-goods trade; got tired of selling goods over the counter. I'm going through."

The boys looked curiously at the Boston dry-goods salesman, who had come all the way to Council Bluffs to find a chance to go to California. He said his party had broken up and gone back.

"We'll think it over," said Barnard.

"All right," said the Boston man. "My name is Montague Morse."

CHAPTER V

NEW PARTNERS

The boys were a little shy of Mr. Montague Morse. He had the appearance of "a city chap," Hiram Fender said. He wore a plaid velvet vest, a black frock-coat (somewhat seedy, to be sure), and his trousers, though tucked into the tops of his calfskin boots, were more suitable for Boston streets than for the great plains. Then he was very precise in his language, and had a way of saying "good morning," instead of "mornin' to yer," which quite discomfited Hiram and Tom. The latter took the earliest opportunity to declare that "that Boston feller was cranky." It seemed very odd, too, that he should be knocking about there on the frontier, alone, and seeking a chance to get in with some party bound across the continent. To be sure, he said that his party had broken up and had left a yoke of cattle on his hands; but how did they know that he had not stolen these oxen? Arthur fairly shuddered when this dark suspicion crossed his mind; and he looked involuntarily to see if their new acquaintance did not have the "game leg" by which Johnny had de-

scribed a missing adventurer. Morse, however, told a very straightforward story, and his manner was so frank and open that one of the party, at least, regarded him with favor. Barnard said, after much deliberation: "That fellow is clear grit."

One afternoon the boys, leaving Tom at home "to keep house," crossed the river and hunted up Morse, who was temporarily quartered at the camp of some Illinois men. They saw his oxen grazing in the meadow hard by, and soon satisfied themselves that he had honestly come into possession of them. The people at the Illinois camp knew all the circumstances of the breaking up of the Boston man's party, and they incidentally told the story over again while gossiping about the intended trade with our boys.

"But if we take your cattle in with our team we shall have to trade off our horses, and get a yoke of oxen for ourselves," interposed Barnard.

"Hosses? have you got a hoss for sale?" asked one of the Illinois party.

"We have a pair," replied Barnard, "which we shall not want if we go on with cattle. What do you think are best for the plains—cattle or horses?"

"Well, some allow that hosses is best, because they're the fastest; then, agin, there's them that allows that cattle's best, because they hold out better in the long run. Then, agin, cattle can feed where hosses would

e'enamost starve to death. Hosses is delicate critters, powerful delicate. How much do you allow you'll get for yer hoss?"

Hiram broke in with the information that they had not made up their minds to sell. They were only considering the matter. At this, a silent man, who had been mending his trousers in a corner of the tent, spoke up:

"I know four chaps camped down by the creek. They've got a cheap yoke of cattle—a young cow and a smart little steer: just the thing for a leadin' yoke."

Arthur laughed outright at the idea of driving a cow in an ox-team.

"Well, you may laugh, young feller," said the man, as he shut up one eye and tried to thread his needle; "but let me tell ye that cows is cows in Californy—one hundred and sixty or seventy dollars a head, I've heerd tell; and a good drivin' cow will pull like all possessed, if she's rightly yoked. Then there's yer milk all through, ye see, fur nothin', so to speak." And he resumed his mending.

"It wouldn't do any harm to go and see that team of mixed critters," suggested Hiram.

So the boys started up, and, getting directions from the party in the tent, went off to find the camp by the creek. As they were moving away, the spokesman of the Illinois men called after them:

"I'll trade with ye for that white hoss of your'n. I seen him when we war comin' through Ioway. Say sixty-five dollars?"

"He's worth seventy-five," called back Hiram, and the boys went on together, the Boston man leading off at a great pace. They searched around a long time before they found the camp of the men who had a yoke of cattle to sell. At most of the camps where they inquired things seemed gloomy. The latest news from California was unfavorable. Many were talking about turning back, but many others were doggedly completing their preparations for the final start. One man, standing on the wheel of his wagon, with a marking-brush and pot of paint, was printing on its canvas cover the words "California or bust." This was a sort of defiant declaration that many men thought it necessary to make, considering how many people were endeavoring to discourage others. The sign was common on the tents and wagon-covers of the emigrants. Others had such inscriptions as "We are bound to go through," or "Bound for the Sacramento," and one party had painted on their wagon-cover "Root, hog, or die."

It was a picturesque sight this city of emigrants. More people were here than on the east side of the river. Most of them had completed their outfit at Council Bluffs, and were fixing up the few odds and ends that were needed before the final start. Already they af-

fected the rude ways and manners of the plains. For the most part, the men wore slouched hats, and red or blue flannel shirts; they discarded coats and vests, and wore belts at the waist. The weather was mild, for it was now early May, and groups of emigrants were cooking in the open air, and carrying on a sort of outdoor house-keeping, of which their wagons were the foundation. Here and there was a family of father, mother, and children. One wagon the boys saw had "No more Missoury for us" painted on its dingy red cover in black letters; and a flock of white-haired children—Arthur said there were sixteen—climbed out and in, staring open-eyed at the strangers. This populous group had no tent; they lived wholly in the wagon, an enormous affair with a tall top, high at each end and lower in the middle. The father of the family, a yellow-faced, discouraged-looking man, wearing mud-colored clothes of home-spun, "allowed" that he was from "Arkinsaw," and was not quite sure whether he should go to California or Oregon. He should go by the North Platte route, and turn off to the north by the Fort Hall road, if the gold news should "peter out" by the time he reached that point.

"Gosh! how that Boston fellow do walk," sighed Hiram, who found it difficult to keep up with their new comrade. Morse strode on ahead, talking eagerly over his shoulder; and the hard buds of the "rosinweed"

plants that covered the meadow rattled against his boot legs as he measured off the ground. Arthur trotted along somewhat laboriously, and wondered if all Boston people walked like Mr. Montague Morse.

They found the men who had the ox and cow for sale—four great hulking fellows who had four yoke of cattle among them. They had two wagons, one of which they had exchanged for provisions and cash in the town of Council Bluffs, and the other they retained. They would sell the ox and cow together for sixty-five dollars. The cow was "skittish and a little wild-like," but a good milker and was first-rate in the yoke. The steer—well, there he was, a small black fellow, with one horn crumpled down in the oddest sort of way.

"Strong as a steam-ingine," explained the owner. "Strong as a steam-ingine and tame as a kitten. And, stranger, he's just the knowingest critter you ever see. 'Pears like he was human, sometimes—hey, Tige!" and the man affectionately patted the little black steer on his nose.

"Is this all you've got to sell?" asked Hiram, rather discontentedly.

"Well, the fact is, stranger," replied the man, "we don't really want to sell. 'Pon my word, we don't. But we've no need fur all these cattle, and we do need the money. I just hate like poison to part with Old Tige. (His name's Tiger, you see, and we call him

Tige for short.) But we've got three other yoke and a light load; and we allow to go through right peart, without no trouble."

The boys walked around the cattle two or three times more, their owner treating them to a long string of praises of his odd yoke, as he sat on the wagon-tongue and talked fast.

"Come now, say sixty dollars and it's a trade. I want the money powerful bad," he concluded.

Arthur pulled Hiram's sleeve and said:

"Take him, Hi; take him. I like that little black steer."

Hiram spoke up: "Give us the refusal of this yer yoke of cattle until to-morrow?"

"We have not yet concluded whether we shall buy any cattle here, or go on with our horses," explained Bernard. Morse looked a little disappointed, but said nothing.

It was agreed that the boys should have until next day to make up their minds about buying the cattle at sixty dollars for the yoke. As they walked back, Morse, thoughtfully whipping off the weed-tops with his ox-goad, said:

"You fellows take account of stock—wagon, outfit, provisions, and team. I'll put in my yoke of cattle and my share of provisions and outfit, or money to buy them, and will pay you my proportion of the cost of

the wagon. Partnership limited; the concern to be sold out when we get through; share and share alike. How's that?"

"That's fair," said Barnard. But Hiram nudged him, and then he added: "We'll talk it over. You come across and see us the first thing to-morrow morning."

It was agreed, and the boys went back to their camp to discuss the proposition. Barnard and Hiram were really the final authorities in the matter; but Arthur and Tom exercised the younger brother's privilege of saying what they thought about it. Arthur thought the Boston man must be a good fellow. He was bright and smart; and Arthur had noticed that he spoke cheerily to the white-headed children in the Arkansas wagon. Besides, he was always pleasant and full of jokes, added the boy with a feeling that that was not conclusive, though he had formed his opinions partly by it.

"I suppose we have really made up our minds to go with oxen. I like that Boston chap. We can't get another yoke of cattle—if we sell your horse and buy the ox-and-cow yoke—any better than by taking this man into camp with us," argued Barnard.

"But them store clothes!" said Hiram, with some disgust.

"Why, he can't help it if he has to wear out his old

city clothes," said Arthur, eagerly. "He is not foolish enough to throw them away. So he wears 'em out for common ones. Don't you see?"

"And he's a powerful walker," added Hiram with an expression of admiration on his freckled face. "Golly! how that chap kin walk, though!"

And this turned the scale. The Boston man was solemnly voted into the partnership.

Tom once more objected that Morse was "stuck up," and he was once more suppressed by his brother, who reminded him that he talked too much with his mouth. This frequent rebuke having silenced Tom, Hiram added:

"A feller that knows as much about cattle as he does, and kin walk like he does, isn't stuck up. Besides, he'll put in just about eighty dollars inter the company's mess."

At this, little Johnny, who still clung to the boys, started up: "Eighty dollars! Oh, I've got eighty dollars. Won't you take me through for that?"

Hiram looked with some disdain on the little fellow, who was trembling with excitement, and said: "You got eighty dollars my little kid! Where?"

Johnny hastily stripped off his striped trousers, and, turning out the lining of the waistband, showed four flat, round disks of something hard, carefully sewed in.

"Them's it! them's it! Four on 'em; four twenty-

dollar gold pieces, all sewed in." And, slitting little holes in the cloth, he showed the coins, sure enough, each sewed in separately from the other.

"Poor little chap! We don't want to take your money," said Barnard.

"No," added Hiram. "Besides, you hain't got no clothes wuth speaking about. You can't go across the plains in them clothes."

"They're not 'store clothes,' though, Hiram," added Arthur with a laugh. But Arthur's heart had gone out to the poor little waif, and he reminded his comrades that part of his money might be used for an outfit, and it would be only fair to take part as his share of the cost of the trip.

"Besides, I've got clothes," said the waif; and, unrolling his bundle, he showed some coarse woolen shirts, a pair of cowhide shoes, overalls, and a few small articles of wearing apparel.

Barnard inspected these critically, and said: "No woman folks put these up; but they'll do better than nothing."

Arthur felt a touch of homesickness at this remark, and his thoughts flew back to his mother as he glanced over his own tidy suit, the work of his mother's hands. He saw her again at the garden-gate, as he had seen her many a time while camping out in the lovely Iowa prairies; and, with a soft voice, he said:

"Let's take Johnny along, boys. He shall have half of my blankets."

"What do you say, Barney?" asked Hiram, with a little glow in his honest heart, though he looked at the waif with an air of severe scrutiny.

"I'm agreed, if you are," replied Barnard. "But I tell you what it is, Arty—our tent is full, and we can't have any more passengers or lodgers. The partnership is complete this time."

At this Johnny, who had ripped out the four gold coins from his waistband, put them into Hiram's hand, and said:

"Am I going through with you?"

"Well, I allow you shall go through with us, youngster. It's share and share alike, you know; and you are to do your part of the work. That's all. There's nothin' comin' to ye when we get through. Understand that?" And a hard look flitted across the young man's face as he jingled the gold in his palm.

Johnny protested that he understood the bargain perfectly. He was to have such clothes as they thought necessary. The rest of his cash was to pay for his share of the provisions needed for the trip.

Next day Morse came over early, with the information that the Illinois men would give seventy dollars for Hiram's white horse. Morse was informed of the conclusion of the partnership discussion. The terms

were once more gone over and fairly understood on both sides, and the bargain was ratified. "Now, then," said Barnard, "this is Mister Hiram Fender, late of Lee County, Illinois, known as Hi Fender for short. This is Thomas Fender, brother of the same, and 'a right peart boy,' as he says; otherwise Tom. And this infant is my brother, Arthur Adams Stevens, probably the best boy that ever lived—except myself—and is known in this camp as Arty. As for myself, I am Arty's brother, which is glory enough for me, and my name is Barker Barnard Stevens; otherwise Barnard, usually called Barney for short, and sometimes dubbed Barney Crogan, by my small and impertinent brother."

The boys laughed heartily at this long speech; Morse, not to be outdone in advancing into intimate acquaintance, said:

"Permit me, gentlemen, to introduce myself—Montague Perkins Morse, late of Hovey & Co.'s, Boston; now bound for California, or bust; and generally known as Mont Morse, or, if you prefer, Mont—and very much at your service."

With a great deal of enthusiasm, the boys celebrated this happy conclusion of affairs by going over the river and closing the two bargains. The white horse was sold to the Illinois men for seventy dollars; and they took Tige and Molly, for these were the names of the ox and cow, at the sum agreed upon the day before.

"We will move over here to-morrow," said Hiram, "and we will take the cattle off your hands then."

"But to-morrow is Sunday," said Mont. "We are not going to travel Sundays, are we?"

Hiram looked a little troubled for a moment. Then Barney cheerily said:

"Oh, no; we are not going to travel Sundays, except in cases of great emergency. Are we, Hi?"

"Certainly not," answered Hiram, briskly. "Never allow to travel on Sundays, not if we can help it."

"Then you'll keep the cattle until Monday, won't you?" asked Barnard.

"Well, if you fellers are too pious to come over on Sunday, you may take 'em away now," said the man, gruffly.

"All right," replied Hiram. "We'll take them now, and be beholden to nobody for nothin'."

So the cattle were taken across the ferry, and the boys had milk with their corn-meal mush that night.

"A mean old hunks," growled Hiram. "Wanted us to smash Sunday all to pieces, did he? Well, I allow we made just two milkings out of him."

Sunday here was not like the Sabbath at home. Labor was generally suspended throughout the camps, however, except where some impatient party stole out with their teams, driving along with a half-subdued air, as if afraid "to smash Sunday all to pieces." Here

and there, emigrants, looking neat but uneasy in their particularly clean clothes, lounged about the wagons and "traded" in undertones, or discussed the latest news from California, by way of the States.

The bright May sun shone down upon a motley mass of people scattered among tents or grouped around wagons. About noon, the blowing of a horn announced that a religious service, of which notice had been previously circulated, would begin. There was a general sauntering in the direction of a cluster of wagons near which a preacher, standing on a feed-box, called the people about him.

Five or six women, wives of emigrants, aided by twice as many men, formed a choir, and their voices rose sweetly on the air with the familiar hymns of Christian service. Then the minister, after devotional exercises, preached a little sermon from the text in Romans viii., 17. He talked about heirs and heirship; he dwelt on the fact that they were all seeking an inheritance, and while he inculcated wisdom and prudence in this search, admonishing the people about him to seek the true riches, he reminded them that they were joint heirs; that their inheritance was mutual. He taught them to bear with one another; to be patient, loving, and to go on in their journey of life, as across the continent, with unselfishness, bearing each other's burden.

"That's a right smart chance of a sermon," said Hiram as they moved away after the last hymn had been sung and the attentive crowd had dispersed. "A good sermon; and just you remember what the parson said about toting one another's burdens, you Tom, will ye?"

Tom received this lesson with some show of indignation, and said:

"O yes, you're the man that hears sermons for some other feller, you are."

But Arthur added in the interest of peace:

"Tige can't carry the yoke alone. Molly must bear up her end. So if you and I don't wash the dishes and get supper, Hi and Barnard can't drive the wagon and get wood and water."

"Good for you, Arty," said Hiram, heartily. "And even little Johnny here is goin' to pitch in and do his share. I know he is, for I seen him choppin' wood this mornin' like sixty."

Johnny colored with pleasure at this rude praise, and Arty declared that Johnny was one of the joint heirs whom the preacher had talked about.

The debate about the sermon and their future united interests was a pleasant end to a pleasant day. Mont had taken up his abode with the party. The tent was full, and the six young fellows were paired off among the quilts and blankets that covered their floor of grassy earth.

That night Arthur felt Johnny stirring under the blankets by his side.

"What is the matter, Johnny?" he asked.

The boy put his thin hand on his companion's shoulder and whispered in his ear: "I love you."

Arty kissed the little waif and said: "It's a bargain." Then they slept again.

CHAPTER VI

ADRIFT

"Well, now, Johnny, you do look right peart." This was Hiram's opinion of the little lad when he had been equipped with his new suit of clothes. He brought enough apparel with him for common wear; but he needed a serviceable suit for a change. This, with the necessary boots and shoes, a warm jacket for cold weather, and some additional supplies which his enlistment in the company required to be bought, made quite a hole in the eighty dollars which he had put into the common fund.

"Never mind, youngster," said the good-natured Hi. "I allow we'll have enough for all hands to get through on; so as you pitch in and do your share of work, we sha'n't find no fault."

Johnny declared his willingness to do all he could for the benefit of the company, whether it was picking up fuel, washing dishes, or driving the team. He was quite a man now, he thought, though only a little fellow. For wasn't he bound for California to make his fortune? And he was going with his own resources,

too, and could earn his way. This thought made the boy cheerful and happy; the color came again into his cheeks; he grew merry and frolicsome; and, before the last days of preparation were over, the poor outcast was, as Hi said, "right peart."

They had delayed at the river a long time. There were many things to be disposed of, and their places to be supplied with articles which were more needed. There were preventives against scurvy to be bought, for they had heard that some emigrants ahead of them had suffered from that dreadful disease, just as sailors do on the ocean when their vegetables and fresh provisions give out. So the boys laid in a supply of dried apples and vinegar, and traded away some of the stuff which they had in excess. Then parts of the wagon had to be changed to suit the oxen, as they were now to make the voyage across the plains with cattle instead of horses.

One bright May morning they took down their tent, packed their bedding, loaded the wagon, yoked up the cattle, and began their long, long tramp across the continent. Numerous other emigrant trains were stretching their way over the rolling prairies to the westward, and the undulating road was dotted with the white-covered wagons of their old neighbors of the canvas settlements by the Missouri River. Looking behind, they saw, with a little pang of regret, the well-

beaten spot where they had made their home so long. Around that place still lingered a few emigrants, who waved their hats to them by way of cheer, as the long procession of adventurers wound its way over the ridges. Beyond and behind was the flowing river; the bluffs which give their name to the town bounded the horizon, and beyond these was the past life of these young fellows, with all its struggles; there was home.

Before them lay the heart of the continent with its mysteries, difficulties, and dangers. They tramped on right bravely, for beneath the blue horizon that lured them forward were wealth, fame, adventure, and—what these bright young spirits most longed for—opportunities for making their own way in the world. At any rate, they had turned their backs on civilization and home.

Their patience was tested somewhat severely during their very first week on the track across the continent. They expected disagreeable things, and they found them. They had been travelling through a rolling country, destitute of timber and dotted with only a few bunches of brushwood by the creeks. Barney, Arthur, and Tom took turns at driving the team. Mont strode on ahead. Hi and Johnny "changed off" with riding Old Jim, for whose back a saddle had been "traded" for at the Bluffs. The young emigrants were in first-rate spirits, and when a light rain came up

at night, they laughed blithely over the prospect of soon getting used to the "hardships" of which they had been so often warned. It was discouraging work, however, cooking supper; for, by the time they had camped, the rain fell in torrents. They got their camp-stove into the tent, and, by running out its one joint of pipe through the open entrance, they managed to start a fire. More smoke went into the tent than out of it, for the wind had veered about and blew directly into it. Then they decided to strike the tent and change it around so as to face to the leeward. This was a difficult job to do while the rain fell and wind blew. But the boys packed their camp stuff together as well as they could, and took down the tent.

"Hold on tight, boys!" shouted Barnard, cheerily, for the canvas was flapping noisily in the wind, and threatened to fly away before it could be secured. Arty held up one pole and Barnard the other, while Mont, Hi, and Tom ran around to pin the canvas to the earth, Johnny following with the bag of tent-pins. Just then a tremendous gust came, and away flew the tent like a huge balloon, jerking Tom head over heels as it went. Poor little Johnny clung to it desperately, having caught hold of one of the ropes as it went whirling over his head. He was dragged a short distance and gave it up, his hands being cut and torn by the line.

"Stop her! stop her!" yelled Hi, and away they all ran after the flying canvas. The cattle were cowering under the lee of a few bushes across the road, and the apparition of the collapsed tent coming over their heads startled them so that they ran wildly in all directions. The cow was caught by the horns, a fold of the tent-cloth having been entangled on them, and she set off, frantically bellowing, across the prairie. The canvas by this time was so wet and heavy that it could not be dragged far, and, when the boys came up, poor Molly was a prisoner. They rescued their fugitive house, and, in a sorry plight, took it back to where their camp was now exposed to a pelting rain.

"Ain't this fun, Arty?" said Hi, grimly, when they were once more under cover.

"Fun alive!" replied Arty. "And so long as we have a roof over us for the night, we are in great luck. But how we are ever to get supper is more than I know."

"Supper?" retorted Barnard. "I'd like to know where we are going to sleep to-night. Every inch of ground is sopping wet, and no fire that we can build will dry it."

"We can get a good fire in the stove," said Mont, sagaciously, "and keep moving it about until we dry the worst of it; and, when it stops raining, it will drain off a great deal. But it does not look much like holding up," he added, as he looked out at the sheets of

rain. "And if it don't hold up, we may as well not go to bed at all."

Indeed, the prospect was rather gloomy, and the young emigrants began to think themselves early introduced to the disagreeable part of their trip. They managed to keep up a roaring fire in their camp-stove, however, and the air in the tent was dry and warm. They made tea and fried their meat, and with dry crackers secured a tolerable meal. By midnight the rain abated and ceased flowing under the canvas. They then lay down on the damp blankets, and slept as best they might. Toward morning Arty awoke, and, hearing the rain on the canvas roof, reached out his hand and found the ground near by covered with water. Water was everywhere around him. He lay in a puddle which had accumulated under him. At first he thought he would turn over and find a dry spot. But he immediately discovered that that would not be a good plan. He had warmed the water next him with the natural heat of his body. To turn over was to find a colder place. So he kept still and slept again as soundly as if he were not in a small pond of water.

They were wakened after sunrise by the sound of wagons driving by. Jumping up from their damp beds, the young emigrants found themselves somewhat bedraggled and unkempt. But the rain had ceased, the sun was shining brightly, and what discomfort can long

withstand the influence of a fair day, sunshine, and a warm wind?

The cattle, fastened up the night before to the wagon-wheels, were lowing for freedom; and the boys were at once ready to begin preparations for another day's journey. They spread their bedding and spare clothing in the sunshine, brought out their camp-stove, built a fire, and had a jolly breakfast with hot biscuits and some of the little luxuries of camp fare.

All that day the boys travelled with their blankets spread over the wagon-top, in order to dry them in the hot sun; but not one of the party complained of the discomforts of the previous night, nor showed any sign of being any worse for sleeping in the rain.

"It gets me, Mont," said Hi Fender, "that a city feller, like you, should put up with such an uncommon hard night without growling."

"Oh, that's nothing when you get used to it," said Mont, lightly.

"But you are getting used to it sooner than I am," replied Barnard, with admiration for the young city fellow's pluck.

"There ain't much such accommodations in Boston, I allow?" said Hi. "No sleepin' out in canvas tents, with the water creeping under your blankets, in that village, is there?"

"Well, no; but we cannot bring city ways out on

the plains, you know, Hi; and as long as we have a canvas roof over us, we ought to be satisfied and thankful. By the way, I wonder how those Pike County fellows got on last night. They intend to sleep in their wagon when they have reduced their load, but they sleep on the ground now. Must have found it a little damp last night."

Barnard thought that Bush, with his heifer and go-cart, would be worse off than anybody they knew. Bush was a jolly emigrant, travelling all alone with a hand-cart fixed up with shafts, into which was harnessed a young cow. He had quarrelled with his partner at Council Bluffs, and had gone off in a fit of disgust. His entire worldly wealth was packed into the little cart, with one or two sacks of flour, some "side meat," beans, and coffee. His cooking apparatus consisted of a frying-pan and a tin pot, in which latter useful utensil he made his coffee and cooked everything that could not be cooked in his frying-pan.

"I don't believe Bush put in much time singing last night," said Tom. "If his fiddle wasn't drowned out, he was, I'll just bet."

"There he is now!" said Arty, and as he spoke they saw Bush's tall form stalking beside his queer little team, and rising over a swell of the prairie, just ahead.

At camping-time that night they overtook Bush, who was as gay and light-spirited as ever. He hailed

the boys with heartiness, and begged the privilege of baking a cake of dough in their camp-stove.

"The fact is, boys," he explained, "me and Sukey had a rough time of it last night, and I guess a hot corn-dodger will help us both mightily. Hey, Suke!" he said, lovingly, for Bush and his vicious little cow were on very good terms.

"Rain?" he said in answer to the boys' inquiries. "Rain? Oh, no, I guess not. It didn't rain at all worth mentioning. It jest came down on the run. Well, it did. I crawled under the go-cart, where the water wa'n't more than a foot deep. It wasn't dry quarters; but I could have got along as gay as you please only for my legs. They're so all-fired lengthy that they stuck out and got wet. When I pulled 'em in, my head stuck out, and when I pulled my head in agin, my legs stuck out. Pity about them legs, ain't it, boys?" he added, looking down at his canvas-covered limbs. "Howsomever, I thought of you chaps. I'm used to it, but you Boston fellers ain't seasoned yet. I was camping by myself over behind the divide, to keep out of the wet, and when I saw your tent get up and dust, I started to lend you a hand. But you corraled the pesky thing before I could get to you."

"Much obleeged, I'm sure," said Hi. "But we caught her on the critter's head afore she went far."

"Yes, yes, a tent's a mighty onhandy thing, I do be-

lieve. Good enough for them that can't get along without it; but as for me, as the revolutionary feller said, gimme liberty or gimme death. I'd rather sleep out o' doors."

"Queer feller, that Bush," said Hi, when they were squatted about their camp-table at supper-time. "He's tough as sole-leather and chipper as a cricket. And he allows to go clean through to Californy with that 'ere go-cart and heifer. Why, the Mormons will steal him, his cow, and his cart, and all, if he ever gets so far as Salt Lake."

"They'll be smart, then, for he sleeps with both eyes open," said Barnard, who admired Bush very much

They were camped in a low, flat bottom, by the river Platte. Tall cotton-woods fringed the river-bank, on the north side of which the emigrant road then ran. Here were wood, water, and grass, in plenty; and at this generous camping-ground many emigrants pitched their tents for the night. After supper was over, the boys strolled out among the camps and enjoyed the novel sight. The emigrants had now got into the ways of the plains—were doing their own cooking and washing, and put on their roughest manners and roughest clothes, and were already beginning to talk about the Indians. The Cheyennes, it was said, were very troublesome just beyond Fort Laramie; and it was reported that one party of emigrants had been attacked near the Point of Rocks, and all hands killed.

At one camp-fire where our boys lingered, Bush was the centre of a large party, to whom he was singing his one great song, "Lather and Shave." It was a famous song of many verses—ninety-nine, Bush said; but he never had time to sing them all, though often invited to give them. His violin had so far survived all misadventures, and furnished lively music for the company. One handsome young fellow, with a tremendous voice, sang a ditty about emigrating to the gold mines, of which the refrain was:

> "Ho! ho! and the way we go,
> Digging up the gold on the Sacramento!"

All the bystanders and loungers joined in this chorus with spirit, the last syllable of Sacramento being shot out with a will—"Toe!"

At another camp they found a forlorn little woman dandling a child on her knee, sitting on a wagon-tongue, while her husband was trying to get supper under her directions. The fire would not burn, the man was awkward, and his patience seemed clean gone as he finally squatted back on the ground and caught his breath, after blowing at the fire until he was red in the face.

"Yes, we've had a powerful bad streak of luck," he complained. "First, she took sick at the Bluffs," he said, jerking his head toward the woman on the wagon-

tongue. "That kep' us there nigh onto a month; and my pard, he got out of patience and lit out and left us. Then the young one up and had the cholery yesterday, and we broke down in that thar slew just beyond Papes's, and we had to double up teams twicet that day. And now then this yere blamed fire won't burn, and we be agoin' to Californy. We be," he added, with great sarcasm. "I never could build a fire; hit's woman's work, hit is! Oh, look at yer, smolderin' and smudgin' thar!" he continued, addressing the sulky fire. With a sudden burst of rage he kicked the smoking embers to the right and left with his heavy boots, and said, "Blast Californy!"

"Here, let me try," said Tom. "I'm right smart at fire buildin'," and the boy gathered the half-charred embers together, and deftly fanned a flame from them by wafting his hat before the coals, into which he poked some dry stems and grass. The fire recovered itself cheerily, and the man looked down on Tom's stooping figure with a sort of unwilling admiration. Arthur did not like the looks of a husband who seemed so indifferent to his wife and baby.

"Here, give me the baby," said the boy; "I'll tend it while you get your supper. And, Mister, you had better look after your cattle. I see they've got all snarled up with that ox-chain."

"Drat the cattle!" said the man; and he went off to

swear at the poor beasts which had managed to turn their yokes and worry themselves generally into a tangle, while waiting for their master to take care of them for the night.

"Don't mind him," sighed the woman, relinquishing the sick baby to his volunteer nurse. "Don't mind him. He's got a right smart of a temper, and he do get contrairywise when things goes contrairywise, and the good Lord knows they have gone contrairywise ever since we left the States. Now trot the young one easy-like, if he hollers, and I'll just rattle up some supper for my ole man."

Arty held the baby as tenderly as he could, softly moving up and down on his knee the unpleasant-looking feather pillow on which it was laid. A tall young girl came around from behind the wagon; looked at the emigrant's wife, who was kneading biscuit, kneeling on the ground; looked at Arthur, who was crooning a little song to the sick baby; and then she remarked:

"Goodness, gracious me!"

"Nance!" said Arthur, looking up.

"Yes, it's Nance," retorted the tall young girl, with some asperity. "Leastways, I'm called sich by folks that haven't got no more manners than they have room for."

"Beg pardon, Miss Nancy. But you surprise me so, you know."

"I suppose you don't allow I'm surprised. Oh no, not the leastest bit. You a-tending baby out here on the perarie! Howsomever, I like it, I like it! I declare to gracious, I do!" she added in a milder tone. "It's just what boys are fit for. Hope you've learned to make bread by this time. Scalded their flour, the ornery critters! Oh, my!" and, overcome by the recollection of that first great experiment of the boys when in Iowa, the tall young girl sat down on the wagon-tongue and doubled herself up again.

"Never mind," she said, disengaging herself from her laugh. "If you'll come over to our camp, I'll give you some yeast—real hop-yeast; brought it all the way from Ioway myself. It's good enough to bust the cover of your camp-kettle off."

"Your camp! Are you going to California?" asked Arthur, with surprise.

"Goin' to Californy! Of course we be. What else do you suppose we'd be campin' out here on the Platte, miles and miles away from home, for?"

"But how did you pass us?"

"Couldn't say. Dad, he allowed he wouldn't stop at the Bluffs more'n one day. Oh, he's got the gold fever just awful!"

"Was he thinking of going to California when we passed your place in Iowa?"

"Couldn't say. He seen the folks piling by on the

emigrant road, bound to the gold mines. He used to set on the fence and swap lies with 'em by the hour, and ma just hollerin' at him from the back-door all the while. Oh, my! wasn't she mad, though!"

"Didn't she want to come?"

"Not at first; but she got to talking with some of the women-folks on the road, and then she and dad talked gold all night and all day. They jest got wild. So one day, dad, he let the place, picked up his traps, bundled us into the wagon, and here we be."

"How do you like it, as far as you've got?" asked Tom, who by this time had become very much interested in Nance's story.

"Pretty tolerble-like. How's yerself?"

"Oh, it's pretty good fun, all but washing dishes," replied Tom, bashfully.

"Washin' dishes!" retorted the girl, with great scorn. "And you call yer handful of tin plates and things washin' dishes. Don't I wish you had to do up the dishes I had at home in Ioway! Oh, it's real persimmons, this,—just nothing to do. Barefooted, you see," and Nance put out a brown foot, to show that she had left her shoes with civilization.

"Where's your other fellers?" she asked, "specially that one that scalded his flour?"

Arthur explained that they were about the camps, having tarried where Bush was playing his violin for a

"stag dance," as it was called, down by the cotton-woods.

"Well, you come over to our camp to-morrow, early, and I'll give you some real hop-yeast. It's worth a hull raft of bakin' powder and self-risers. We're off at sun-up. So long!" And Nance was gone.

"Right smart chance of a gal, that," commented the emigrant, whose anger had cooled, and who was sitting on an ox-yoke contentedly smoking his pipe.

"So Miss Sunbonnet is going to California, is she?" said Barnard, when the boys related their interview with that young woman.

"Yes," replied Arthur, remembering Nance's brown foot; "she's going a-digging up the gold on the Sacramen—toe!"

CHAPTER VII

TROUBLE IN THE CAMP

THE next few days of travel were very wearisome and tedious. The road was a dull level, stretching along by the banks of the Platte River. Repeated rains had made the ground soft, and the teams moved with great difficulty, for all of the emigrants were loaded heavily. From Council Bluffs to Salt Lake City was an uninterrupted wilderness, with only here and there a little trading-post. The provisions consumed on the trip could not be replaced until the Mormon capital was reached; and even at that place only flour and meat could be bought at reasonable prices. So the supplies of groceries, clothing, and small goods needed for the journey must last from the Missouri to the Sacramento.

The weather was warm, and our young emigrants found it very uncomfortable trudging along in the heat of the day, with the sun's rays pouring down upon them. Hi grumbled a great deal at the disagreeable things he had to encounter. It was disagreeable walking and disagreeable driving. It was particularly dis-

agreeable to be pursued as they were by mosquitoes. At night, while they camped in the flat valley of the Platte, these pests were simply intolerable.

"Let's make a smudge, boys," said Barnard one night, when they had in vain tried to eat their supper in comfort. Clouds of mosquitoes hovered about their heads, filling their eyes, ears, and noses, and making the air shrill with their music.

"We might as well be smoked to death as stung to death," growled Hi. "I never see anything so disagreeable. It's wuss than small-pox."

So the boys collected some hazel-boughs and grass, made a fire on the ground and covered it with the green stuff, and soon had a thick "smudge" of stifling smoke about them. The mosquitoes seemed to cough a little among themselves, and then they gradually withdrew in disgust.

"That worries the pests," said Mont. "I think I see five or six hundred of them on that hazel brush, waiting for the thing to blow over; then they will make another rush at us."

"Yes," added Hi, "and there's one big he feller; I see him now, cavorting through the under-brush like mad. He got some smoke in his left eye, and he'll make us smart for it when he comes back. Ugh! ugh! but this smoke is wuss than git-out. I can't stand it no longer!" and Hi, choking with the effects of the

"smudge," seized his plate of bread and bacon, and ran. The others stayed as long as they could, and then left everything and retired to a little distance from the fire. The mosquitoes were ready for them, and descended upon them in millions.

The boys, finishing their supper as best they might, got inside the tent, leaving a circle of smoking fire-heaps all about it. Sleep was impossible that night. They visited some of the neighboring camps, of which there were a great many; and everybody was fighting mosquitoes. Smoldering fires all about were kindled, and public feeling ran very high against the great nuisance of the night. One man remarked that there ought to be a mass-meeting called and resolutions passed. Another suggested that the mosquitoes were the original settlers on the place, and that they had rights which even a white man was bound to respect.

During the night, too, the cattle, which were chained up as usual, were so frantic with the annoyance that they were in danger of injuring themselves. They ran to and fro with their short allowance of chain, snorted, tore the earth, and lashed themselves into a frenzy. It was decided to unyoke them and take the chances of finding them in the morning. Tige, as soon as he was at liberty, walked deliberately up to one of the smudge fires, where he turned his tail toward it and stood contentedly chewing his cud.

"Sagacious Tige," said Mont, "I believe I will follow your example."

Tige appreciated this compliment, apparently, for he lay down, having tested the value of smoke as a shield against mosquitoes. Mont rolled himself in his blanket and lay down by another fire, and managed to sleep almost as well as Tige. The others did the same, though it was hard work to keep up the fires and find sleep also. Arthur woke up long before daybreak, with the insects buzzing and stinging about his face. He jumped up in sheer desperation and ran wildly out on the level road, half a mile or more, without stopping. He could hear the bodies of the mosquitoes striking on his hat as he fled. Then he turned and ran back again, leaving a long train of the pests behind him. But they caught up with him by the time he had reached the camp. In despair, he covered his head with a blanket, and sat down by a tree trunk to sleep again, having first stirred up a good smudge for Tige, who looked on complacently at this provision for his comfort. Arthur stooped and brushed a few mosquitoes from Tige's black muzzle, and the steer looked up at him intelligently, as if to say, "Hard lines, these, my boy."

"Arouse ye! arouse ye! my merry Swiss boys!" sang Mont, bright and early next morning, while the rest of the party were yet struggling with mosquitoes

in their dreams. "We have a long drive to the crossing of Loup Fork, to-day; and if we don't get there in good season, we shall have to wait a whole day to get a chance on the ferry."

The boys turned out of their various lairs with many expressions of discomfort. They had just had a tiresome day's travel and almost no rest at all. The air was now moist and warm, with the promise of another hot day. They were smarting with mosquito bites, and were generally uncomfortable.

"Well, I allow this is reely disagreeable," said Hi, half sitting up, clasping his hands across his knees, and looking excessively miserable.

The picture of Hi, squatted there forlornly, with his hat crumpled over his head, his face blotched with bites, and his eyes heavy with sleep, was too funny for Barnard, who laughed outright and said:

"Well, I declare, Hi, but you do look like the very last rose of summer that ever was!"

"See here, Barney Crogan!" said Hi, angrily, "I don't want none of your sass. And I jest give you notice of that."

"What are you going to do about it?" sharply replied Barnard, who felt his anger rising. "You sit there like a bump on a log, saying that things are 'disagreeable,' and I don't see that that helps it."

"Well, I don't want anybody's chin about it—that's

what I don't want. And I allow I ain't agoin' to stand no nonsense from a feller that don't take his regular spell at drivin'."

"What do you mean?" said Barnard, advancing threateningly toward Hi, who, by this time, had risen to his feet and stood with his blanket still clinging about him. "What do you mean? If you mean to say that I don't do my share of work, I'll——"

"Oh, stop! stop! boys," interposed Mont. "There's really no use of quarreling. I suppose we all feel cross and unhappy, after such a miserable night. I'm sure I do. But we needn't quarrel."

"Who's quarrelin', I'd like to know. I ain't. It's that stuck-up——"

But before he had time to finish his sentence, Mont had playfully put his hand on Hi's mouth, saying:

"Well, I know I am a stuck-up Boston chap, but I'll try to get over it."

Barnard was secretly amused at this ingenious turn, but he was too angry to say anything, and he turned his attention to the cattle.

Tom and Johnny, the latter somewhat alarmed at the warlike appearance of things in camp, scoured the under-brush for dry wood for their breakfast fire.

"If Barney had sassed me like that," commented Tom, when out of earshot of his elders, "I would have punched his head for him."

"Appears to me that Hi had no cause to fire up so —Barney didn't mean anything; and I'm sure Hi did look queer-like, sitting there with his hat mussed and his head all swelled up."

"I'll swell your head for ye, yer ongrateful little weasel. Yer always takin' Crogan's side"—and Tom dealt him a blow behind the ear. Johnny tumbled over a clump of brush, crying, not so much with pain as with anger and mortification. Tom only muttered, "You can't sass me, you know."

Loaded with their fuel, they went back to the camp, where Arthur, with a lowering brow, was busy over the fire, making ready for breakfast.

"What's the matter with *you?*" he asked with amazement and some asperity, as he noticed the tears on Johnny's face.

"I punched his head for his sass," said Tom, defiantly.

Without a word, Arthur banged Tom over the head with the sheet-iron stove-cover, which he happened to have in his hand. The boy felt the indignity, for his face was covered with soot and his eyes smarted. But, before he could get at Arthur, who stood by the stove, his eyes sparkling, and his lithe young form swelling with anger, Mont seized Tom and drew him away. Johnny threw himself on Arty and entreated him not to fight on his account, meanwhile protesting that it was nothing at all.

Luckily the other late combatants were not at hand, and Mont, helping Tom to remove the soot from his face and hair, soothed his angry feelings and asked him to promise to leave off quarreling.

"You shouldn't have struck little Johnny; you know that, Tom. He is a little chap, much smaller than you, and it was a cowardly thing for you to knock him over."

"But that's no reason why Art should whack me over the snoot with a griddle," answered the lad.

"Certainly not, certainly not; but he did that in a moment of passion. I dare say he is sorry for it by this time. If he is not, I shall be sorry for Arty; he usually means to do what is right. It was wrong for him to strike you; there's no doubt about that. But you will forgive him, if he asks you?"

"I allow he won't ask," said Tom, with great grimness.

"But if he does?"

"All right, let him come on. I'm ready for him, anyway."

It was not a merry party which sat down to breakfast together that morning. Mont found it difficult to keep up an animated conversation. Hi had only one word, and that was "disagreeable." Perhaps they should not have eaten much breakfast, as the usual result of bad feelings is to destroy one's appetite.

On the plains this rule does not always hold good. I am bound to say that they ate very heartily, for they had had almost no supper on the night before.

When the cattle were yoked up and the caravan was ready to move, Mont picked up the whip and said, with a cheery look at the others:

"Let me drive to-day."

"You can't," said Hi, stiffly, but not unkindly.

"Let me try," and Mont moved off with the team as steadily as if he had driven oxen all his life. He had watched the driving of Hi and Barnard, and had practised some with the cattle when they were turned out at noon, yoked together, for a short rest. Molly, the skittish little cow, would occasionally "gee," or bolt out of the track, which was always a great source of annoyance even to Hi, for Molly was on the "off" side, and it was sometimes necessary to run around the head of the cattle to get the mischievous animal back into the track again. But Mont got on capitally; he walked by the side of the docile and knowing Tige, who seemed able to keep all the rest of the team in good spirits. Tige was fond of potatoes, sugar, bread, and many other luxuries usually denied to cattle, and Mont kept on good terms with the queer little steer by carrying the odds and ends of his own rations in his pocket for Tige.

But even Tige's good-nature, combined with Mont's,

could not cheer up the rest of the party. Little Johnny, perched on old Jim's back, paced along beside the wagon, never galloping off on brief excursions by the roadside, as he usually did when allowed to ride the horse. Hi trudged along sulkily behind; Arthur walked on ahead to Loup Fork Ferry; and Barney, in defiance of rules and usage, climbed into the wagon, where, on top of the load and close against the wagon-bows, he went to sleep.

Before noon they reached the ferry, so long looked for and talked about. The Loup is one of the forks of the Platte, and in those days it was crossed by a rope-ferry, which some enterprising man had put in there. A long scow, large enough to take on two wagons, with the usual number of cattle, slid across the stream, attached by slings and pulleys to a rope tightly stretched from shore to shore. The current was swift, and, by keeping the scow partly headed up stream, the pressure forced the unwieldy craft across.

Here were numerous teams waiting their chance to cross, each being numbered in turn. Some of them had waited two days for their turn to come; but to-day their number had been reduced by the departure of several who had gone to a place farther up the Fork, where it was reported that a ford had been found. Our party ascertained that they could cross by sundown; so they unhitched their cattle and waited,

having first paid the ten dollars for ferriage which the avaricious ferry-keeper demanded for each team.

The young fellows took this opportunity to rest. Barnard sat lazily on the bank angling for catfish. Hi climbed into the wagon and went to sleep. Mont chatted with the ferry-master, who sat in the doorway of his log hut and surveyed the busy scene below him with the air of a wealthy proprietor.

"I should suppose that you would get the gold fever, seeing so many people pressing on to the mines," said Mont.

The ferryman chuckled, and waving his pipe toward the rude ferry, said:

"Thar's my gold mine. Ten dollars a pop."

"Yes, that's so. I suppose you are making a mint of money."

"Not so dreffle much, not so dreffle much," the man replied, uneasily. "Ye see, repa'rs and w'ar and t'ar are mighty bindin' on a man, cl'ar out hyar on the plains. Why, I hev to go cl'ar to K'arney for every scrap of anything."

"But your receipts must be enormous. Let me see. You can make at least twelve trips a day; you get, say, twenty dollars a trip, sometimes more, and that is two hundred and forty dollars a day."

"Powerful smart on figgers you be, young feller," said the man, and he laughed with a cunning leer in his eye at Mont.

Meanwhile, Tom leaned over the slight fence with which the ferryman had inclosed his "garding," as he called it. The boy coveted the young onions just beginning to show their bulbs half out of the warm soil; and he meditated on the scarcity of potatoes which their appetites were making in their own stores. Arthur came up and laid his hand on Tom's shoulder, and looked over too.

"Looks something like home, don't it, Tom?"

"Yes," replied Tom. "I was just a-thinkin' how dad never would plant garden truck. Always wheat, wheat, wheat. Blast the wheat, when a feller has to go to the neighbors for garden sass."

"But, then, we sometimes get 'sass' without going for it," said Arty, with a smile.

Tom's face darkened at this allusion to the difficulties of the morning; but Arty continued:

"I am real sorry, Tom, that I struck you as I did. It was awful mean, and I didn't intend it."

"Yes, you did. How else could you done it?"

"Well, Tom, it's a hard case to explain. My hand just flew up before I knew what I was about. The first thing I knew I had hit you. Come now, I assure you I am sorry, and I want to make up."

"All right," grumbled Tom.

"You forgive me, honor bright? Well, give us your hand."

Tom looked around awkwardly at Arthur, for he

had kept his eyes fixed on the onion-bed during this brief dialogue. He glanced into Arthur's pleasant boyish face, and said frankly:

"Quits! we'll call it square, and there's my fist on it."

As the sun began to drop behind the horizon, the turn for our young party to cross came at last. They had waited nearly ten hours, and were right glad when they were able to see the way across clear for them. The scow could not reach the farther shore, as there was a long shallow all along that side. So the clumsy craft was run across until it grounded; then a wooden flap or apron was let down, and the teams were driven out into the water, wading the rest of the way. It was a poor way of crossing a stream, but it was the best practicable then and there.

With much hallooing, shouting, and running hither and thither, the cattle were driven into the scow. The current was swift and the channel deep; the crossing looked perilous, especially when the cattle were restive. Molly was particularly troublesome, and Hi went around on that side to quiet her. She would not be quieted, and with one vicious toss of her horns, she lifted Hi by his leather belt. In an instant he was overboard, struggling in the stream.

No one else was on that side of the boat; but Barney saw the accident, and exclaiming, "He can't swim!

he can't swim!" rushed around to the rear of the craft, pulling off his clothes as he ran.

All was confusion, the scow being crowded with men, cattle, and teams. The frail craft quivered in the tide, while the startled boatmen were puzzled what to do. Diving under the rear wagon, Barney reached the gunwale of the boat just in time to see Hi's hands clutch ineffectually at the edge. He made a lunge and seized one hand as it disappeared, and, falling on his knees, reached over and seized Hi's shoulders.

"Never mind, Barney boy, I'm on bottom," said Hi. Just then he stood on his feet, and the boat grounded on the shoal.

Barnard drew a long sigh of relief, and looked for an instant straight down into Hi's blue eyes. They were friends again.

Hi was helped on board, none the worse for his unexpected ducking. They drove off the scow, waded across the shoal, and struggled up the bank with much turmoil and bother. They camped near the river, and surrounded themselves with a cordon of smudge-fires. The mosquitoes troubled them very much; but, notwithstanding that, they passed the evening cheerily. Tom observed, with much inward surprise, that Hi had exchanged his wet clothes for a spare suit of Barney's.

And yet Hi had clothes enough of his own.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES

For many days after leaving Columbus, as the ferryman facetiously called his log-house, our emigrants traveled with an immense company. One train alone had nearly two hundred head of cattle, either in yoke or loose, and fifteen wagons. It was a brave sight to see this long caravan winding along the track, with its white-covered wagons gleaming in the sun, and the animals walking along behind in the most orderly manner. Many of the men were on horseback, and skirmished to the rear, to the front, or by the flanks of the train as it moved. Arthur declared that it looked like a traveling circus or menagerie, a comparison which was made more striking by the dress of the emigrants. They wore all sorts of queer garments, which they had picked up from abandoned camps. In those days of the gold rush, people were reckless about waste, and the trail was strewn, in many places, with valuable goods, thrown away by emigrants who were in such haste to get on that they were continually overhauling their loads to see what they could leave behind to lighten them.

These things were picked up by those who came after only to be again thrown out for others to find and reject. One of the emigrants, attached to this long Missouri train, wore a woman's straw bonnet, of the Shaker pattern, with a large green cape. Another was decorated with a richly embroidered hunting-frock of Pawnee make; and he wore a black silk "stove-pipe" hat, surmounted with a tall eagle-plume. Some of the women of this company rode well, and one little girl, riding a fiery Texan pony, seated astride, excited much admiration by her skilful management of her steed. A party of Pawnees, who had lodges, or "tepees," near by, grouped themselves on a little knoll and gazed on this passing show with great solemnity.

At camping-time, some of these red children of the desert came to the tent of our young emigrants begging and selling moccasins. The Pawnee moccasin is a plain, inartistic affair, shaped almost exactly like the foot of a stocking, with one seam running from the heel downward and lengthwise through the sole and up to the instep over the toe. But as these were the first of "wild Indian" manufacture that the boys had ever seen, each was eager to secure at least one pair.

The Indians were dressed in buckskin hunting-shirts and leggings, were bareheaded, and wore a coarse blanket slung about them. One of them produced from a dirty buckskin pouch a piece of paper, which

he impressively submitted to Mont, as the apparent leader of the party, saying, as he did so, "Heap good Indian me!" The paper read as follows:

This Indian, Mekonee, otherwise known as The-Man-that-Champs-with-his-Teeth, wants a recommendation. I give it with pleasure. He is a lying, thieving, vagabond Pawnee. He will steal the tires off of your wagon-wheels and the buttons from your trousers. Watch him.

(Signed) JAKE DAWSON,
And thirteen others of the Franklin Grove Company.

"Heap good Indian me," said The-Man-that-Champs-with-his-Teeth, when the boys had examined his document.

"Oh, yes," said Hi, "I allow you are the only good Indian that ain't dead yet."

The-Man-that-Champs-with-his-Teeth assented with a grunt of approval, folded up his "recommendation" and put it carefully away, as a very precious thing. While he was walking softly about the camp, as if looking for something to steal, another of the tribe dived into the bosom of his hunting-shirt and extracted a lump of dough. Holding it out to Arthur, who was getting ready the supper, he made signs toward the stove and said, "Cook him?"

Arthur assented, but Barnard cried, "No, no, Arthur! Don't let that dirty fellow's dough go into our oven. He has stolen it somewhere, and has carried it about in his dirty clothes, nobody knows how long."

A PARTY OF PAWNEES GAZED WITH GREAT SOLEMNITY

"I'll let him cook it on top of the stove then," said Arthur; and the Pawnee put his cake on the outside of the camp-stove, where Arthur covered it with a tin dish. The Indian, with an expression of intense satisfaction, squatted by the hot stove, and never took his eyes off of it until his dough was bread and delivered, blazing hot, into his hand.

The Indians carried bows and arrows, and one had a battered army musket, which he declared, proudly, was "heap good—killed buffalo six mile off." This piece of brag tickled Hi so much that the Indian seized that opportunity to beg powder, shot, or lead. These were not given him; and he renewed his application for "whisk" (whisky) or "sugee" (sugar), both of which the Indians particularly hanker after. These persistent beggars got very little for their trouble, Arthur having vainly interceded in behalf of The-Man-that-Champs-with-his-Teeth, who offered to give "heap moccasin" for a red silk handkerchief of Barnard's which he very much desired.

"Where you from?" asked the Indian, as if attracted by Arthur's good-natured and pleasant face.

"From Richardson, Lee County, Illinois," said Arthur. "You know it is the land of the prairie, one of the great States that belongs to your Great Father and mine. The people in that land are many; they are like the leaves on the trees, they are so many. They

are going to the land of the setting sun, where the gold shines in the waters of the Sacramento. The pale-faces are covering the continent. They will leave no room for the red man, the deer, and the buffalo. Are you not sorry for this?"

"Whisk," said the red man, stolidly.

"A good oration, Arty!" laughed Mont. "But Mr. Man-that-Champs-with-his-Teeth don't understand it. He understands 'whisk' and 'sugee,' and he don't care for the pale-faces as long as he gets these. Look out! there goes the cover of your camp-kettle!"

Arthur turned just in time to see the Indian who was squatted by the stove calmly fold his arms over a suspicious bunch in his blanket. Mont stalked over, pulled the blanket from the Indian's unresisting arm, and the iron cover rolled out upon the ground. The copper-colored rascal smiled cunningly, as one should say, "I missed it that time, but never mind. It's a good joke on me." After that the boys mounted guard at night-watch and watch, as they had been told long before that it would be necessary to do while passing through the Indian country.

Next to "wild" Indians, the boys longed for a sight of the buffalo on his native plain. This came in due time. They had passed up the long tongue of land which lies between Loup Fork and the Platte, and had reached a small stream making in from the north and

known as Wood River. Crossing this, they bore off to the northwest, with the little river on their right.

One hot afternoon, while the party were wearily dragging themselves along, Barnard went ahead with the horse to spy out a good camping-place. Arthur walked on in advance of the team in the dusty road, half asleep, and feeling as if he should be happy if he could fall down in the dust and take a long nap. It was very tiresome, this continual tramp, tramp, tramp, with each day's journey making almost no difference in their progress. Arthur grumbled to himself, and scarcely heard the boyish talk of Johnny, who trudged along with him. Once in a while he felt himself dropping to sleep as he walked. His heavy eyes closed; he lost sight of the yellow wagon-track, the dusty grass, and the earth, which seemed to reel; the blinding glare of the sun was gone for an instant, and he stumbled on as in a dream. Then he nearly fell over forward, and he knew that he had slept by the painful start of awaking. He looked dreamily at the rough soil by the side of the trail, dimly longing to lie down and sleep, sleep, sleep.

Johnny said: "Oh my! Arty! what big black cattle!"

Arty looked languidly across the river, which was here only a narrow, woody creek. In an instant his sleepiness was gone.

"Buffalo! buffalo?" he shouted, and, very wide awake indeed, ran back to the wagon. He was in a fever of excitement, and the news he brought set his comrades into commotion. Each rushed for his favorite fire-arm. Tom extracted his long-unused revolver from the wagon, where it lay unloaded.

"Now, boys, we can't all go over the creek," said Hi. "You, Tom, stay here with the team. Mont, Arty, and I will go over and see if we can knock over a brace of them buffalo."

Tom handled his revolver with a very bad grace, but was mollified when Johnny said he would stay, and perhaps they might see the buffalo cross over and break through the woods below. The banks of the creek were filled with a thick growth of box-elders, but through some of the gaps they could see five buffalo quietly feeding in a V-shaped meadow formed by the junction of two small branches of Wood River.

"We must get above them," said Hi, as they were reconnoitering, "or they will make off by that open place. If we take 'em in the rear they can't mizzle so easy-like."

Mont thought it unsafe to go to the upper part of the meadow, because the wind came from that direction. "And they are very sensitive to any unusual odor in the air," added Arthur. "They can smell a man two miles off, when they are to the leeward."

The boy was trembling with excitement at the sight of this large game, but he remembered his natural history for all that. Even as he spoke one of the feeding buffalo lifted his large shaggy head and sniffed suspiciously to the windward.

The three young fellows separated, Arthur going down the creek, Hi up toward the open, and Mont crossing in the middle of the V, directly opposite where the animals were feeding. They were huge fellows, ponderously moving about and nibbling the short, tender grass. Their humped shoulders were covered with dark, shaggy hair, and their long, beard-like dewlaps nearly swept the ground as they bent their heads to graze. They were not in very good condition, apparently, and the hide of one of them was clouded with a dingy, yellowish tinge. "Just like our old buffalo-robe," secretly commented Arthur to himself, as he lay breathless, near the creek, waiting for a signal from Hi.

Suddenly, to his amazement, a shot burst out from the brush on the farther side of the meadow, and, as the alarmed animals dashed away like cats, another report banged out from the same spot. The buffalo, scattering in different directions, were almost immediately out of reach. Two pitched down into the creek near where they were feeding and disappeared in the woods beyond. One broke through the timber just

below where Arthur was posted, scrambled across the stream, and, with incredible agility, crashed through into the road near the wagon, where Tom gallantly, but ineffectually, assaulted him with his "pepper-box" revolver as he galloped away. The fourth raced up the V-shaped meadow, receiving a shot each from Mont's musket and Hi's rifle in his rapid flight. The fifth made as if he would plunge down into the creek at the foot of the meadow, but, baulked by something, turned and raced up the side of the triangle next the road, heading directly for Arthur, who was concealed behind a bush. "Now or never," said the boy, with his heart standing still and his eye glancing along the sights of his rifle. The buffalo was coming directly toward him, his head down and his enormous feet pounding the earth. Arthur fired, and the buffalo swerved sharply to the right; at the same instant another shot came from the opposite side of the meadow. The buffalo ambled on for a few paces, fell on his knees, dug his horns madly into the ground, rolled over on his side, and was still.

As Arthur, scarcely believing his eyes, ran out into the open, a tall young fellow, carrying a double-barreled shot-gun, rushed up from the other side, and drawing his hunting-knife, cut the animal's throat. There was no need. The great creature was dead.

"My fust buffalo," said the stranger, drawing him-

self up proudly. Arthur looked on, with his heart beating, and said: "I fired at him too."

All this took place in a very few minutes. The firing in all directions was almost simultaneous. Mont and Hi came running up, chagrined at their ill luck, but excited by the sight of the first slain buffalo.

"Who shot him?" eagerly cried Hi, who had not seen what happened below him.

"Well, I allow that I'm the fortnit individual," said the stranger. "Leastways, thar's my mark," and he inserted his finger into a smooth round hole in the centre of the animal's forehead, directly between and a little above the eyes.

"That's just where I aimed," said Arthur, with some excitement.

"No, little chap," said the stranger, superciliously. "I seen you shoot, and your ball must 'a-gone clean over him. Mine's a slug. No or'nery rifle ball's goin' to kill a critter like this," and he gave the dead monster a touch with his boot.

"Let's look at that ball," said Mont, curiously, as the emigrant handled one of the clumsy slugs which had been fitted for the big bore of his gun. Taking it in his hand, and glancing at the wound in the head of the buffalo, he stooped to put it into the wound. The skull was pierced with a sharply defined hole. The stranger's slug rested in the edge of it like a ball in a cup.

"That ball don't go into that hole, stranger," said Mont. "The mate of it never went in there. Give me a ball, Arty." And Mont, taking one of Arty's rifle-balls, slipped it in at the wound; it dropped inside and was gone.

"It's a clear case, Cap," said Hi. "You may as well give it up. That buffalo belongs to our camp, and Arty's the boy that fetched him—you bet ye."

"Well," said the stranger, discontentedly, "thar's no need o' jawin' about it. I allow thar's meat enough for all hands. I'll pitch in and help dress the critter, anyhow," and he stripped to work.

There was certainly no need of disputing over the dead buffalo. It was Arthur's game, however, clearly enough. He received the congratulations of his friends with natural elation, but with due modesty. He crossed the creek again for knives to help prepare the buffalo meat for immediate use. Barnard had come tearing back down the road at the sound of fire-arms, and now stood waiting with, "What luck? what luck?" as Arty waded the creek, yet unconscious of his having been up to his waist in the stream a few minutes before.

Arty told his story with some suppressed excitement, but without any self-glorification. The water fairly stood in Barnard's joyful eyes as he clapped his young brother on the back and said: "Good for you, my old

pard." You see Barnard was beginning to catch the slang of the plains.

They camped right there and then. The buffalo was dressed and the choice parts cut off and cooled in the air, for the sun was now low and night came on. The stranger's comrades, camped on the north side of Wood River, came over and helped the party of amateur butchers, and earned their share of fresh meat, which was all they could carry away and take care of. This was a luxury in the camp. The emigrants had had almost no fresh meat since leaving the Missouri River. Small game was scarce, and only a few birds, shot at rare intervals, had given variety to their daily fare.

The boys stood expectantly around the camp-stove as the operation of frying buffalo steaks went on under the superintendence of Mont and Arthur. Sniffing the delicious odor of the supper which had been so unexpectedly given them, Barnard said: "Obliged to you, Arty, for this fresh beef. You know I hate bacon."

"And the best of it is," added little Johnny, "there's enough of it to go round."

"Which is more than some chaps can say of their pie," said Barnard.

Arty raised his hot face from the frying-pan and laughed.

CHAPTER IX

A MISADVENTURE

The next few days of the journey were toilsome and uncomfortable. The nights were hot, and our emigrants were greatly annoyed with mosquitoes, so that Hi gave notice that he should go crazy if they did not "let up" on him. Long rains had swollen the streams; the Platte overflowed its banks in some places, and the bottom lands opposite Fort Kearney were overflowed. The boys had depended on crossing the river for the sake of visiting the fort, which was on the south side, but they were prevented by the high water. They had no special errand at the fort, but as they had now been a month on the road, they thought it would be pleasant to go over and "see where folks lived," as Barney expressed it. He and Mont made the attempt, but gave it up after wading a long distance through the overflow, without reaching deep water. This was a disappointment, and they pushed on with a slight feeling of loneliness. They all wanted to see what a frontier fort was like, though they knew that it was only a collection of substantial buildings—barracks and storehouses—surrounded by a stockade. There was

something romantic and adventurous about a military post in the Indian country, which to Arthur, at least, was very attractive. The next fort on their route was Fort Laramie, and to this stage on their journey they now passed on, still keeping by the north bank of the Platte.

There was no occasion for loneliness, however, as the road was now all alive with teams. It was the custom for emigrant companies to combine in trains of several companies each. These stopped sometimes, for a day or two at a time, in order to rest, repair the wear and tear of teams, and get ready for a fresh start. On such occasions the camp was busy, though our young fellows enjoyed the rest when it came. It was tedious work, marching all day, camping at night, packing up and beginning another march next day. They knew they must be three or four months crossing the continent, and a "lay-by" of two or three days was always welcome; and nobody thought such a stoppage was a serious delay. After a few weeks, everybody got over all feverish eagerness to be the first at the mines. Now and then some small party of horsemen, lightly equipped and traveling rapidly, pushed by the body of emigrants, their faces eagerly set toward the land of gold, and scarcely taking time to sleep.

From such rapid travelers as these our boys ascertained who was behind, and they soon learned the

names, origin, and character of most of the companies between the Sierra Nevada and the Missouri. While they were camped for a day's rest—Sunday's rest—near Dry Creek, Bush came up with his little cow and cart. He had been traveling with a Wisconsin company, but had left them behind when near Fort Kearney and had pushed on by himself. Bush was full of news. He had passed several parties of whom our boys had heard; and he had been passed by several more, some of whom were ahead, and others of whom were again behind. It was in this way that the intelligence on the trail went back and forth. Emigrants thus learned all about the fords, the grass, wood and water, and the condition of the road before them. Somehow the gossip of the great moving population of the plains flowed to and fro, just as it does in a small village. Men sat around their camp-fires at night, or lounged in the sun, of a leisure day, and retailed to each other all the information they picked up as they traveled. Every man was a newspaper to the next man he met. There was no news from far countries, none from towns, and only a very little from the land to which they were bound. The long column of emigration that stretched across the continent had its own world of news. It was all compressed in the space that lay between the Missouri and the Sierra Nevada. Thousands of camp-fires sparkled at night

along the winding trail that ran on and on across the heart of the continent. Thousands of wagons moved slowly to the westward, an almost unbroken procession through an unknown land; by each fire was a community of wanderers; each wagon was a moving mansion carrying its own family with its worldly possessions, and laden with the beginnings of a new State beyond the mountains.

Just now, camped on a level greensward, with a bright June sun lighting up the landscape, our boy emigrants enjoyed their day of rest very much. They were grouped under the shelter of the tent, which was caught up at the sides to let in the air, for the weather was now growing hot.

"'Pears to me," said Bush, "this tent is mighty fine, but it lets the sun in. It's too all-fired white inside."

"Bush likes to camp under his go-cart," laughed Hi. "But I allow a tent is uncommonly handy when it comes on to rain."

"As for the sun shining in through the cloth," said Mont, "I think I see a way to help that." So he caught up one or two of the blankets, which were opened out on the grass to air, and flung them over the ridge-pole.

"You are a powerful knowin' creeter, Mont," said Bush, admiringly. "A feller'd suppose you had been on the plains all your life. And you a counter-jumper at that."

Barney remonstrated that Mont was not a counter-jumper. "Besides," he added, "it don't follow that a young fellow don't know anything beyond his counter because he has spent some of his days behind one."

"Jess so, jess so," said Bush. "Mont is on hand here to prove just that. There's fellers as takes to rough work and plains tricks and doin's as a cat does to cream. Then again there's fellers as ain't no more use around a team than a cow would be in a parlor."

Mont listened with some amusement to this conversation, as he lay on the ground looking up at the shaded roof of the tent. He explained: "You see, Bush, I like teaming, roughing it, and living out in the open air. Would you like to tend store, lay bricks, or work in a factory?"

"Nary time," rejoined Bush.

"I don't believe you would take to any such business, nor do well in it, if you were put to it. Do you?"

"No. If I was to be sot to work, at regular work, you know, why, I should go right straight down to where flour's fifteen dollars a bar'l, and no money to buy with at that. Oh, no, I'm gay and chipper at trappin', lumberin', gettin' out rock, teamin', or any of them light chores; but come to put me to work, regular work, I'm just miserable."

"Then there's Arty," put in Barney. "He's all for

animals. Just see that steer follow him round after sugar."

Tige had been loitering around the camp instead of keeping with the cattle, which grazed near by, and Arty, having allowed him to smell of a little sugar which he carried in his hand, was enticing him about the camping-ground.

"Dreffle waste of sugar," commented Tom.

'Never you mind about the sugar," said Hiram, reprovingly. "That's the knowingest critter on the plains; and if Arty has a mind to give him a spoonful, now and then, it's all right. We've got enough to carry us through."

Hearing the debate, Arty approached the tent, holding out his hand toward the docile Tige, who still followed him, snuffing the coveted sugar.

"Take care! take care! don't come in here!" yelled Hi. But Arty kept on, laughing at Tige, who seemed also to be much amused. Arty stepped over the body of Barney, who lounged by the door, the steer immediately following him.

"He'll wallop your tent over," shouted Bush, but Tige, still stepping after his master as lightly as a full-grown steer could step, kept on with his nose close to the boy's open hand, and drawing long breaths as he smelled the sugar. Arty circled about the interior of the little tent, and over the prostrate forms of his

comrades, who hugged the ground in terror lest the unwieldy beast should trample on them. They were too much surprised to move, and Tige marched after Arty, turning around inside the canvas house as gingerly as if he had always lived in one.

"Why, he is as graceful as a kitten, and he steps over you as if he were treading among egg-shells," said Arty, shaking with fun. "See how carefully he misses Hi's big feet. Why, Tige is almost as spry as you are, Hi."

"If Tige knocks down that pole I'll trounce you with it," said Hi, who did not relish the common camp joke about his large feet. But the wise little steer passed safely out by the front of the tent, having gone in at one side of the pole and out at the other, without doing any damage. He was rewarded with the sugar which he had pursued into the presence of so much danger, and he lay down at a distance, contemplating the group which he had just visited.

"I think you said something about a cow in a parlor, Bush," said Arty. "What do you think of a steer in a tent?"

"Well, youngster, between you and me and the post, I think the best place for me, as I said afore, is out of doors. It's close, this living in a tent; and when it comes to makin' cattle to hum in one of 'em, I ain't there."

Tige's friendship for his young master was put to the test the very next day. It was a bright Monday morning when they reached Dry Creek. But the creek was by no means dry. Its steep banks were slippery with moisture, and four or five feet of water flowed through its bed. A large number of teams had been passing over, and when our young emigrants came up, there were several companies laboriously making their way across, or waiting an opportunity to strike into the trail; except at one place, a crossing was almost impossible. The wagons were "blocked up," as the water was deep enough in places to flow into the wagon boxes. "Blocking up" was done by driving wide blocks of wood under the box or body of the wagon, said box being loosely fitted into the bed or framework. Thus raised on these, the body of the wagon is kept in place by the uprights at the sides, and is set up high enough to be drawn over an ordinary stream without wetting its contents.

The descent into the creek was no steeper than the way out on the other side. It was hard enough to get down to the stream without damage. It would be still more difficult to get out. Those who were then crossing made a prodigious racket shouting to their animals, at each other, and generally relieving their excited feelings with noise as they worked through the difficulty.

"We shall have to double up, and there's nobody to double up with us," said Barnard, ruefully.

The boys had resorted to the expedient of "doubling up," or uniting their team with that of some passing acquaintance before this. The spirit of good-fellowship prevailed, and two or more parties would combine and pull each other's wagons through by putting on each the horses or cattle of the whole, until the hardest place was safely passed. Here, however, all the travelers but themselves were busy with their own affairs. There was nobody ready to "double up" with others.

"Howdy, youngsters?" said a languid, discouraged-looking man, coming around from behind a red-covered wagon. "Powerful bad crossing this yere."

"Yes," said Arthur, who immediately recognized him as the man who could not make his fire burn when they were camped near Pape's. Just then the sallow woman put her head out of the wagon, and said: "Glad to see you. Me baby's wuss."

"She takes yer for a doctor, Arty," whispered Hi, who remembered that Arthur had tended the sick baby while the mother was cooking supper.

"We 'uns is havin' a rough time, ye bet yer life, but I allow we'll pull through. Want to double up, you 'uns?"

"Yes," replied Mont. "This is a pretty bad cross-

ing and, as you have a strong team, we should be glad to join forces and go across together."

"Jine? Oh, yes, we'll hitch up with ye. Things is cutting up rough, and my old woman she allows we ain't goin' through."

"Not going through?"

"Oh, you keep shut, will ye, ole man?" said the woman from the wagon. "If you had a sick baby to nuss, you wouldn't be so peart."

"I ain't so peart," said the husband, grimly. "But I allow we'll double up, seein' it's you. I war agoin' to wait for Si Beetles, but we'll just snake your wagon over, then we'll come back for mine."

The blocks were got out and put under the wagon-bed, and the stranger's cattle were hitched on ahead of those of our boys. The wheels were chained together, front and rear, so that they could not turn and hurry the wagon down the steep bank.

"Ye'll have to wade for it, boys; you'd better strip," advised Messer, for that was the stranger's name.

"Oh, it's only a short distance," said Mont, measuring the width of the creek with his eye, and observing the depth to which the men then in the water were wading. "Roll up your trousers, boys, and we'll try it that way."

The party, except Hi, who sat in the forepart of the

wagon and drove, rolled up their trousers; and the chained wagon, drawn by four pair of cattle, pitched down the muddy bank, attended on either side by the young emigrants, Bush, and Messer. Slipping and sliding, they reached the bed of the stream in safety, unlocked the wheels and plunged boldly in, though the cattle were bewildered by the cries of the owners and the confusion of the crowd crossing the creek.

By dint of much urging and some punching from behind, the wagon was "snaked" up the opposite bank, and our boys drew breath a few minutes before taking hold of the rest of their job.

"Laws-a-massy me!" cried the poor woman, as the team slid down the bank. "This is wuss than get-out. I'd sooner wade the branch myself." But, before she could utter any more complaints, the wagon was at the bottom of the slope and the chains taken from the wheels. The cattle went into the stream with some reluctance, and Hi, who was driving, yelled, "Haw, there, haw!" with great anxiety. But the beasts would not "haw." Little Tige held in now with sullen courage; the rest of the team persisted in pushing up stream. Arty and Barnard were on the "off" or upper side of the team, but they could not keep the oxen from running wildly away from the opposite bank. The animals were panic-stricken and angry; turning short around they were likely to overturn the

wagon; Arty rushed out to the leading yoke and tried to head it off. Tige was in the second yoke, resolutely pulling back his mate, Molly. It was in vain. Bally, the ox just behind Tige, made a vicious lunge at Arty, who, in dodging to escape the horns of the creature, slipped and fell headlong into the water, there about up to his waist. Immediately, he was struggling among the cattle, where he could not swim, and was in danger of being trampled by the excited beasts. Hi shouted with alarm, and, all clothed as he was, leaped from the wagon. There was no need. Before any of the party could reach him, Arty had scrambled out and had laid hold of Tige's head, that sagacious brute having stood perfectly still and stooping as his young master floundered under his belly.

Dripping with muddy water, and breathless, Arty struggled to his feet just as Hi, similarly drenched, waded up to him. This all took place in an instant, and the cattle, left for a moment to themselves, sharply turned toward the bank down which they had come, still heading up the stream. The wagon toppled on two wheels, quivered, and went over with a tremendous splash.

Everybody rushed to the wreck and dragged out the woman and her sick baby. Both were wet through and through. The cattle stood still now. The water gurgled merrily through the overturned wagon, on

which the owner looked silently for a moment, and then said:

"Just my ornery luck!"

"Luck, man!" said Mont, impatiently. "Why don't you bear a hand and right up your wagon before your stuff is all spoiled?"

"Thar's whar yer right, stranger," replied the poor fellow. "But this is the wust streak yit. It sorter stalls me."

Help came from the various companies on both sides of the creek, and Messer's wagon was soon set up on its wheels again, though nearly all of its load was well soaked. The woman and her baby were taken out on to dry land and comforted by some women who were with the wagons already on the farther side of the creek. When the party finally struggled up and out of this unfortunate place, they found that Messer's wife had been taken in and cared for at a wagon which, covered with striped ticking, stood apart from the others, with the cattle unyoked near by.

"Why, there's Nance!" said Johnny; and, as he spoke, that young woman descended from the wagon and approached.

"Ye're wet, young feller," she remarked to Arty.

"Yes," he responded, wringing out his trousers-legs as well as he could. "We were with the team that upset, and I was upset first."

"Jest like ye. Always in somebody's mess. I'd lend ye a gound, but haven't got but one."

"Thank you kindly. I don't think your gowns would fit me. But that yeast of yours did first-rate." Arthur thought lightly of his own troubles.

"I knowed it would. Have you kept your risin' right along?"

"Oh yes, we have saved leaven from day to day, and so we have 'riz bread,' as you call it, every time we bake."

"Glad of it. We'll have to divide with these Missouri folks. I reckon they've lost all their little fixin's; but then they use salt risin'. Them ornery critters from Pike always do."

The Missourians were in bad plight. Whatever was liable to damage by water was spoiled, and our party of emigrants felt obliged to stop and help the poor fellow unload his wagon, spread out his stuff to dry, and get himself together again for a fresh start. The sun shone brightly and the weather was favorable to the unhappy emigrant, who sat around among his wet goods, bewailing his hard luck, while his chance acquaintances repaired damages and saved what they could of his effects.

His wife, loosely clad in a dress belonging to Nance's mother,—a large and jolly woman,—fished out from the crushed wagon-bows, where it had been suspended in a

cotton bag, the wreck of an extraordinary bonnet. It was made of pink and yellow stuff, and had been a gorgeous affair. She regarded it sadly, and said: "It was the gayest bunnit I ever had."

Nance contemplated the parti-colored relic with some admiration, but said:

"Just you hang that there up in the sun alongside of that feller, and they'll both on 'em come out all right. Fact is," she said, condescending to approve Arty, "he's all right, anyhow; and if that big chap hadn't jumped out of the wagon and left the cattle to take care of themselves, the wagon wouldn't have gone over. So now!"

"But Hi thought Arty was getting killed," remonstrated Johnny. "So he jumped out into the water, head over heels, when he saw Arty fall."

"Don't care for all that," retorted Nance, with severity. "Ye're altogether too chipper. If yer Hi hadn't upset that wagon, I might have seen this yer bonnet before it was mashed."

"Never mind," said Arty. "Perhaps Mont will show you how to straighten out that bonnet, when he has finished mending Messer's wagon-bows. Mont knows almost everything."

"Who is that yer Mont, as you call him, anyhow?" asked Nance.

"He's from Boston, is real smart, and just about knows everything, as I told you."

"Oho! and that's why you are called 'The Boston Boys,' is it?"

"But they call us 'The Lee County Boys.' We came from Lee County, Illinois."

"Lee County, Illinoy!" repeated the girl, with a knowing air. "Folks on the prairie calls you 'The Boston Boys.' So now!"

CHAPTER X

AMONG THE BUFFALOES

WHILE the wagon was yet heavily loaded, the boys spared the oxen, and so seldom rode. At first, the member of the party who drove the team was permitted to sit in the wagon part of the time. But the roads were now very hard for the cattle, and so all hands walked. Old Jim's back was sore; he could not be saddled, and he was left to follow the team, which he did with great docility. The boys hardened the muscles of their legs, but they complained bitterly of sore feet. Much walking and poorly made boots had lamed them. The moccasins which they wore at times were more uncomfortable than the cow-hide boots they had brought from home.

"Confounded Indians!" complained Tom, "they don't put no heels to their moccasins; they tire a fellow's feet just awful."

"Sprinkle some whisky in your boots; that's all the use the stuff can be to us; and whisky is good to toughen your feet." This was Mont's advice.

"But why don't the Indians put heels on their moccasins? That's what I'd like to know."

"Why, Tom, it isn't natural. Those Sioux that we saw down at Buffalo Creek can outrun and outjump any white man you ever saw. They couldn't do it if they had been brought up with heels on their moccasins."

"But for all that, them moccasins are powerful weak in the sole," grumbled Hi. "'Pears to me, sometimes, as if my feet was all of a blister, after travelling all day in the dod-rotted things. Hang Indian shoemakers, anyhow!"—and Hiram contemplated his chafed feet with great discontent.

"Then there's old Bally," chimed in Arty. "He's gone and got lame. He don't wear moccasins, though."

"But," said Mont, "we may be obliged to put moccasins on him—or, at least, on his sore foot."

"What for?"

"Well, we've fixed his foot now two or three times, and he gets no better of his lameness. We might put a leather shoe, like a moccasin, filled with tar, on his foot. That's good for the foot-rot, or whatever it is."

"Gosh!" said Hi. "How much that feller do know!"

"Well," laughed Mont, "I picked that up the other day. Those Adair County men said that if Bally didn't get better, tar would be healing; and they said to bind it on with a shoe made out of an old bootleg."

"Lucky I picked up those boot-legs you thought were of no use, Barney Crogan," said Arthur. "They'll be just the things for Bally's moccasins."

The boys had put up with many discomforts. Sometimes they had no water for drinking or cooking, except what they found in sloughs and swampy places by the track. Often even this poor supply was so mixed with dead grass and weeds that it was necessary to strain it before using it. Then, again, in the long stretch which they were now travelling between Fort Kearney and Fort Laramie, fuel was scarce. Not a tree nor shrub was in sight; buffalo chips were seldom to be found, and the only stuff from which a fire could be made was the dry grass and grease-weed found in sterile spots among the bluffs above the road. They were having hard times. Along the valley of the Platte heavy rain-storms are frequent in the summer time; and, more than once, all hands were obliged to get up in the night and stand by the tent, in a pelting rain, to keep it from blowing away. One night, indeed, after bracing the tent all around outside with extra lines, they were forced to stand on bundles and boxes inside and hold up the ridge-pole, which bent in the force of the gale and threatened to snap in twain. And then the mosquitoes!

But here was a serious trouble. Bally was a surly animal, but he was a powerful fellow and the best

traveller in the team. He had been lame these four days, and was getting worse instead of better. The boys had passed many cattle, turned out on account of their lameness by those who had gone before. They did not like to think of turning out old Bally to die by the roadside. Matters were not so serious as that. But Mont had said, almost under his breath: "If we should have to leave Bally——"

Serious remedies were now to be tried. The tar-bucket was taken out from under the wagon, and a shoe made from one of provident Arty's boot-legs. With the assistance of Bush, Messer, and one or two neighbors at the camp, poor Bally was cast by suddenly pulling on ropes attached to one hind-foot and one fore-foot. The big beast fell over on his side with a thump that made Arty's heart jump. Then each person held that part of the animal to which he had previously been assigned. Nance, whose father was now with them for a time, looked on with profound interest.

The struggling animal subsided, after a while, into an angry quiet, his eyes rolling wildly at Arty and Johnny, who sat on his head to keep him down.

"Set onto him heavy, boys," said Bush. "'S long's he can't lift you, he can't lift his head; and 's long's he can't lift his head, he's got to lay still."

But he did not lie still. When the shoe, full of soft tar, was fairly on, but not tied, Bally wiggled his tail

very animatedly, cuffed Bush on the side of his head with the lame foot, which he suddenly jerked out of the hands of the operators, and, with one mighty effort, threw up his head, angrily brandishing his horns the while. Arthur and Johnny flew into the air, one to the right and one to the left, as Bally's head swung in either direction. Struggling to his feet, the worried beast shuffled off a few paces, his shoe half sticking to his foot in slip-shod fashion; then he stopped and regarded the whole party with profound disfavor.

"Wal, I allow you are a nice creeter, you are!" said Hi, with disgust. "Don't know yer best friends, you don't, when they're trying to cure ye up."

"Why, he's as spry as a cat and as strong as an ox," cried Bush. "But them boys is spryer. See 'em go. Tore yer shirt, didn't it, Arty?"

"My belt saved me," said the boy bravely, exhibiting a huge rent in his flannel shirt, and a long red streak on the white skin of his chest, where Bally's sharp horn had plunged under his belt and sharply along his "hide," as Bush called it. Johnny had turned a somersault, lighting on his shoulders, but without serious damage.

"Well, we've got it all to do over again," was Mont's philosophic comment; and, under his leadership, Bally was once more thrown and held down until the shoe was firmly fixed on his foot. He walked off with a

limp, evidently very much puzzled with his first experiment in wearing leather shoes.

"Looks like a bear in moccasins," said Hi, grimly. "Leastways, he looks as I allow a bear would look in moccasins, or with one of 'em onto him. Next time you are sot on a steer's head, Arty, you git where he can't h'ist you higher'n a kite when he tries to git up."

"I sat where I was told, Hi; but I didn't weigh enough. That's what was the matter."

Their lame ox did not keep his shoe on more than a day or two at a time, and the boys soon had the disagreeable task of replacing it quite often. It was a troublesome affair; but they were now obliged to face the more troublesome question of supplying his place, in case it became necessary to leave him behind. Bally's mate was like him—a large and powerful ox; Tige and Molly, the leaders, were lighter. With these three and their horse, Old Jim, they might go on; but the prospect was gloomy.

"Pity we can't hitch up some of these buffaloes that are running around loose," said Barnard, with a personal sense of the wastefulness of so many cattle going wild, while they needed only one draught animal. "Could we catch one of these critters and put him into the yoke, I wonder?"

"You catch one, and I will agree to yoke him," laughed Mont.

It was not surprising that Barney grumbled at the waste of animal power, and that a wild notion that some of it ought to be made useful crossed his mind. The country was now covered with vast herds of buffaloes, moving to the north. One day, Mont and Arty ascended a steep bluff, to the right of the road, while the wagon train kept slowly on below them. As far as the eye could reach northward, the undulating country was literally black with the slow-moving herds. Here and there, on some conspicuous eminence, a solitary, shaggy old fellow stood relieved against the sky—a sentinel over the flowing streams of dark brown animals below. They moved in battalions, in single files, by platoons, and in disorderly masses, stretching out in vast dark patches and covering the green earth. Before them was grass and herbage; behind them was a trampled, earthy paste.

Occasionally, these migratory herds, coming to a stream, rushed in thirstily, each rank crowding hard upon another. When the foremost struck the water, galloping along with thundering tread, the fury of their charge sent the spray high in the air, like a fountain. In an instant, the crystal current was yellow and turbid, with the disturbed soil; then a dense mass of black heads, with snorting muzzles, crowded the surface from bank to bank.

"See! see!" cried Arthur. "How those big fellows

run on ahead, lie down and roll, and then jump up and dash on again. Why, they're spryer than old Bally was the other day, when he pitched me sky high."

"Yes, and if you watch, you will see that all the buffaloes on the side of that bluff drop in the same place, roll and skip on again, almost like a lot of cats."

"Why do they do that, Mont?"

"Well, you know that most hairy animals like to roll; I suppose it answers for a scratching-post. If you ever come to a tree in this part of the country, you will find it all worn smooth and tufted with loose hair, where the buffaloes have rubbed themselves against it."

"But, somehow, these chaps all seem to drop in the same place and then canter on again. I should think each buffalo would want a clean spot."

"Oh no! that place is worn to the soil now, and is a better one to rub the hide of the creature in than a grassy place would be. For years after this, if we were to come along here, we should find a big patch right there where the buffaloes are rolling as they trot along. The grass won't grow there again for a great while. That is what the plainsmen call a buffalo-wallow—though a 'waller,' I believe, is the correct plains expression."

"I like you, Mont," said Arty, looking frankly into Morse's eyes, "because you know everything."

"Oh no, Arty, not everything. You are a partial

friend. I'm only a greenhorn. But look at that! My! But isn't that a sight?"

As he spoke, a vast crowd of animals, moving from the eastward, came surging up over a swale in the undulating surface. There seemed to be hundreds of thousands. The ground disappeared from sight, and in its place, as if it had swallowed it, was a flood of dark animal life. There was no longer any individuality; it was a sea. It didn't gallop; it moved onward in one slow-flowing stream. There was no noise; but a confused murmur, like the rote of the distant sea before a storm, floated on the air. There was no confusion; in one mighty phalanx the countless creatures drifted on, up the hills and down the horizon.

"Jingo!" exclaimed Arty. "I don't wonder Barney grumbles because there is so much cattle-power running to waste. Don't I wish we could hitch up four or five yoke of those old chaps! We'd go to California just 'fluking,' as Bush would say."

"If I had my way about it, my boy, I'd have some of that good, nice buffalo-beef that is running about loose here cut up and sent to poor folks in Boston."

"Well, there are poor folks in other cities besides Boston, Monty, you know."

"To be sure; only I think of them first, because I know them. And wherever they are, some of those same poor folks don't get fresh meat very often. And

here's millions and millions of pounds going to waste. It seems to me that there's a screw loose somewhere that this should be so."

Arthur regarded this wonderful cattle show with great soberness and with new interest.

"Why can't some rich man have these buffaloes killed, and the fresh meat sent to the poor people who starve in cities?"

"Perhaps a more sensible plan would be to bring the poor out here."

"Sure enough," responded the lad, "I never thought of that. But if next year's emigrants kill the buffaloes like they do now, there will be none left when the settlers come. Why, I counted twenty-seven dead ones on the cut-off, yesterday, when Johnny and I took that trail back of Ash Hollow."

"And even the animals that are cut into are not used much for food," added Mont. "We have all the buffalo meat we want; and while you were off, yesterday, I passed a place where some party had camped, and I saw where they had kindled a fire from an old, used-up wagon, and had heaped up two or three carcases of buffaloes to burn. Great waste of fuel and meat, too, I call that. But I greased my boots by the marrow frying out of the bones."

Mont and Arty descended the bluff, and reaching the rolling plain behind it, moved to the north and west,

keeping the general course of the road, but leaving the bluff between it and them.

"We have nothing but our pistols to shoot with," said Mont, "and I wouldn't shoot one if I could. But we may as well see how near we can get to them."

They walked rapidly toward the moving mass of buffaloes. Here and there were grazing herds, but most of them seemed to be slowly travelling without stopping to eat. Mont advised that they should creep up a bushy ravine which led into a gap in the hills, and was blackened on its edges with buffaloes. Cautiously moving up this depression, they emerged at the farther end and found themselves in a throng of animals, just out of gun-shot range. Some were standing still, others were moving away, but all regarded the strangers with mild curiosity.

"Why, I thought I should be afraid," confessed Arthur.

"No," whispered Mont. "As long as they are not enraged by a long chase, or driven into a corner, they are as harmless as so many cows."

Passing out between the hills, the young fellows found themselves on a nearly level plain. Here, too, was a dense throng of buffaloes, stretching off to the undulating horizon. As the two explorers walked on, a wide lane seemed to open in the mighty herds before them. Insensibly, and without any hurry, the crea-

tures drifted away to the right and left, browsing or staring, but continually moving. Looking back, they saw that the buffaloes had closed up their ranks on the trail which they had just pursued; while before, and on either hand, was a wall of animals.

"We are surrounded!" almost whispered Arthur, with some alarm.

"Never mind, my boy. We can walk out, just as the children of Israel did from the Red Sea. Only we have waves of buffaloes, instead of water, to close behind and open before and be a wall on each side. See!"

And, as they kept on, the mass before them melted away in some mysterious way, always at the same distance from them.

"See! We move in a vacant space that travels with us wherever we go, Arty."

"Yes," said the lad. "It seems just as if we were a candle in the dark. The open ground around us is the light we shed; the buffaloes are the darkness outside."

"A good figure of speech, that, my laddie. I must remember it. But we are getting out of the wilderness."

They had now come to a sharp rise of ground, broken by a rocky ledge, which turned the herds more to the northward. Ascending thus, they were out of the buffaloes for the time, but beyond them were thousands more. Turning southward, they struck across the

country for the road, quite well satisfied with their explorations.

Between two long divides, or ridges, they came upon a single wagon, canvas-covered, in which were two small children. Two little boys were playing near, and four oxen were grazing by a spring.

In reply to Mont's surprised question as to how they came off the road, and why they were here alone, they said that their father and uncle had come up after the buffaloes, and were out with their guns. Their mother was over on the bluff, a little rocky mass which rose like an island in the middle of the valley. She had gone to hunt for "sarvice-berries." They were left to mind the cattle and the children.

"Pretty careless business, I should say," murmured Mont. "Well, youngsters," he added, "keep by the wagon; and if your cattle stray off, they may get carried away by the buffaloes. Mind that!"

They went on down the valley, looking behind them at the helpless little family alone in the wilderness.

"A man ought to be whipped for leaving his young ones here in such a lonely place," said Mont.

Suddenly, over the southern wall of the valley, like a thunder-cloud, rose a vast and fleeing herd of buffaloes. They were not only running, they were rushing like a mighty flood.

"A stampede! a stampede!" cried Mont; and fly-

ing back to the unconscious group of children, followed by Arthur, he said: "Run for your lives, youngsters! Make for the bluff!"

Seizing one of the little ones, and bidding Arthur take the other, he started the boys ahead for the island-bluff, which was some way down the valley. There was not a moment to lose. Behind them, like a rising tide, flowed the buffaloes in surges. A confused murmur filled the air; the ground resounded with the hurried beat of countless hoofs, and the earth seemed to be disappearing in the advancing torrent. Close behind the flying fugitives, the angry, panic-stricken herd tumbled and tossed. Its labored breathing sighed like a breeze, and the warmth of its pulsations seemed to stifle the air.

"To the left! to the left!" screamed Arthur, seeing the bewildered boys, who fled like deer, making directly for the steepest part of the bluff. Thus warned, the lads bounded up the little island, grasping the underbrush as they climbed. Hard behind them came Arty, pale, his features drawn and rigid, and bearing in his arms a little girl. Mont brought up the rear with a stout boy on his shoulder, and breathless with excitement and the laborious run.

Up the steep side they scrambled, falling and recovering themselves, but up at last. Secure on the rock, they saw a heaving tide of wild creatures pour

tumultuously over the edge of the ridge and fill the valley. It leaped from ledge to ledge, tumbled and broke, rallied again and swept on, black and silent save for the rumbling thunder of countless hoofs and the panting breath of the innumerable multitude. On it rolled over every obstacle. The wagon disappeared in a twinkling, its white cover going down in the black tide like a sinking ship at sea. Past the island-like bluff, where a little group stood spellbound, the herd swept, the rushing tide separating at the rocky point, against which it beat and parted to the right and left. Looking down, they saw the stream flow by, on and up the valley. It was gone, and the green turf was brown where it had been. The spring was choked, and the wagon was trampled flat.

Fascinated by the sight, Mont and Arthur never took their eyes from it until it was over. Then returning to their young charges, they saw a tall, gaunt woman, with a horror-stricken face, gathering the whole group in her arms. It was the mother.

"I don't know who you be, young men, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart," she said. "Yes, I thank you from the bottom of my heart—and, oh! I thank God, too!" And she burst into tears.

Arthur, at loss for anything else to say, remarked: "Your wagon is all smashed."

"I don't care—don't care," said the woman, hys-

BEHIND THEM, LIKE A RISING TIDE, FLOWED THE BUFFALOES IN SURGES

terically rocking herself to and fro where she sat with her children clasped to her bosom. "So's the young ones are safe, the rest may go to wrack."

As she spoke, a couple of horsemen, carrying rifles, came madly galloping down the valley, far in the wake of the flying herd. They paused thunderstruck, at the fragments of their wagon trampled in the torn soil. Then, seeing the group on the rock, they hastened on, dismounted, and climbed the little eminence.

"Great powers above, Jemimy! we stampeded the buffaloes!" said the elder of the pair of hunters.

Arty expected to hear her say that she was thankful so long as they were all alive.

"Yes, and a nice mess you've made of it." This was all her comment.

"Whar's the cattle, Zeph?" asked the father of this flock.

"Gone off with the buffaloes, I reckon, dad," was the response of his son Zephaniah.

The man looked up and down the valley with a bewildered air. His wagon had been mashed and crushed into the ground. His cattle were swept out into space by the resistless flood, and were nowhere in sight. He found words at last:

"Well, this is perfeckly rediclus."

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE BOSTON BOYS LOSE AN OLD FRIEND AND FIND A NEW FRIEND

"We are from Cedar Rapids, Iowa," was the answer of the buffalo-ruined emigrant, when Mont asked him about his company. "The way we came to be here was this: My brother Jake here and I wanted to hunt buffaloes, so we left the train back at Crab Creek, and just scouted on ahead to get a crack at the buffaloes. She wanted to come, and as she wouldn't leave the children, we all bundled into the wagon and allowed to stay here a couple of days before the rest of the train came along."

"How many teams are there in your train?" asked Mont.

"Twenty-five teams, ten horses, and a hundred and seventy-five head of cattle."

"Oh, well," said Mont, "you will get along all right."

"I ain't so sure of that, stranger. The train's getting short of grub already; and if we are able to get to Salt Lake without being on allowance, we'll be lucky."

"Well, ole man," put in the wife, "you've lost your wagon and all yer fixin's. How'll ye get to go back to

the road? Here's these young ones to be taken back somehow."

One of the men stayed to look for the missing oxen, which he never found; and the other, assisted by Mont and Arthur, made his way to the emigrant track with the children. They remained with our boys until night, when the well-known Cedar Rapids train, to which they belonged, came up and received their unlucky comrades.

The country at this point grew more broken and woody, and, for some reason, the emigrant trains became more numerous. Feed for the cattle was not always to be had, because there were so many animals to be pastured on the short, bunchy buffalo grass of the region. Each separate party drove its oxen out among the hills when the camps were pitched; but it was necessary to watch them at night, and for this purpose many companies combined, and so divided their burdens by standing "watch and watch" with each other.

Mont was anxious about poor old Bally. His foot grew continually worse, and it seemed cruel to drive him in the team, but there was no help for it. They must get on somehow, and Bally, lame though he was, could not be spared from the yoke.

"If we only had money enough now," said Arty, "we could buy a steer from some of these droves. There are cattle enough and to spare."

"But not money enough and to spare," responded Hi gloomily. "If Bally don't get shut of his lameness, we shall have to leave him. And I don't see no way of goin' through with one yoke of oxen and a cow and one old hoss."

This was the first time the subject had been openly discussed with such a despondent conclusion. But each one of the party had thought it over by himself. There was silence in the camp. Every day they passed cattle and horses left by their owners because they were unfit to travel. Their dead bodies were common by the way. But these were usually animals from large trains, or from the teams of parties too weak to get along alone, and had joined forces with others. What could they do? asked Arthur to himself. Then he said, almost in a whisper:

"If we have to leave Bally, what shall we do next, Hi?"

Hi had no answer. But Mont said, decidedly:

"I shall go on, if I have to walk or take passage in Bush's go-cart!"

"I just b'lieve you'd do it, Mont," said Hi, with admiration. "If the wust comes to the wust, we can lighten our load and hitch up Jim ahead of Tige and Bally's mate, and try that."

"Lighten our load?" asked Tom. "How's that? We've thrown out all the loose truck we could spare."

"Tommy, my boy," said Hi, with great solemnity, "there's heaps of fellers, this very minute, a-goin' on to Californy and livin' only on half-rations, for the sake of gettin' through. I seen a man back at Buffalo Creek who allowed that he hadn't had a square meal since he left the Bluffs, except when he had buffalo-meat, and that is not to be got only now. Bumbye it'll be out of reach."

"So you mean to chuck out the flour and bacon, do ye?" said Tom, with great disgust.

"That's about it, sonny."

"Then I'll go back with the first feller we meet bound for the States."

The others agreed that they would stay by each other and get through *somehow*. Even little Johnny was appalled at the bare idea of turning back. There was nothing for him behind; his world was all before him; his friends were all here with him.

But no such necessity overtook them.

They had looked forward with curiosity to Chimney Rock, a singular pillar of stone, standing like a round chimney on a cone-shaped mass of rock, on the south bank of the Platte. This natural landmark, several hundred feet high, is seen long before it can be reached by the emigrants toiling along the wagon-track by the river. The boys had sighted its tall spire from afar, and when they camped opposite

it, one night, they felt as if they had really got into the heart of the continent. They had long ago heard of this wonderful rock, and its strange shape, apparently sculptured by some giant architect, towered before their eyes at last.

"I reckon that there rock must have been pushed up by a volcano," said a tall stranger, joining the boys as they were wondering at Chimney Rock, after having camped.

"Perhaps the soft rock and soil which once lay around it have been cut away by the rains and winds," said Barney, diffidently. "You see the bluffs near by are still wasting away from the same cause."

"Like enough, like enough. But what's the matter with that critter of your'n? 'Pears like he was gone lame."

Hi explained the difficulty, and told their visitor that they were travelling slowly for the purpose of making the trip as easy as possible for poor Bally.

"What! you don't drive that beast, do ye?"

"We have to. We have only two yoke of cattle, counting him."

"Well, he'll never get well in the team. Take him out and let him crawl on by himself, and mebbe he'll mend. I've got one hundred and fifty or sixty head over there"—and the stranger pointed to his camp on the other side of the road.

There were three wagons; two of them were immense square-topped affairs, with openings at the side, like a stage-coach door. The people lived in these wagons and slept in them at night, having several feather beds packed away in their depths. One team was made up wholly of bulls, of which there were four yoke. Just now, the cattle were at rest, and two hired men were herding them, while the women, of whom there were several, prepared supper.

"My name's Rose," the stranger said, when his offer of assistance had been gladly accepted. "They call us 'The Roses' along the road. I have my mother, father, and sister along with me; then there's Scoofey and his wife and baby; and Al and Aaron, they're workin' their passage through."

"What part of the country are you from?" asked Hi.

"Sangamon County, Illinoy," replied Rose. "I've heerd tell of you boys. 'The Boston Boys' they call you on the trail, don't they?"

"No, we are the Lee County boys," said Mont, smiling.

"But," exclaimed Arthur, "we are called 'The Boston Boys' too; I've often heard that name, lately. Mont here is from Boston, Captain Rose."

"It don't make no difference how you are called, boys, and I allow we'll get along together for a spell.

We're travelling the same road, and as long as we are, you're welcome to the use of one of my steers. I allow that you'll be willing to take hold and help us drive the herd now and then?"

The boys willingly consented to this arrangement, and poor Bally, next morning, was taken out of the yoke and allowed to go free in the drove of the Roses. But the relief came too late. Each day the ox travelled with more difficulty. Every morning, before starting, and every noon, when stopping for the usual rest, Bally was thrown down and his foot re-shod and cleansed. It was of no avail. Barney took him out of the herd and drove him alone, ahead of the rest. But it was agony for the poor creature; he could barely limp along.

In a day or two the train, now quite a large one, reached Ancient Ruins Bluffs, a wonderful mass of rock, resembling towers, walls, palaces, and domes, worn by time and crumbling to decay. Here the road became rough and stony, and the way by the side of the beaten track was hard for the lame ox. Barney and Arthur clung affectionately to Bally. He was an old friend, and, notwithstanding his vicious manner of using his horns, they did not like to leave him. Reluctantly, they gave him up here. They must go on without him, after all.

When they moved out of camp in the morning, Bally,

who had been lying down watching the preparations for the day's march, got on his feet with difficulty, as if ready to go on.

"Never mind, old fellow," said Mont. "You needn't bother yourself. We will leave you here to feed by yourself and get well, if you can."

"Good-by, Bally," said Arthur, with a little pang, as they moved off. The creature stopped chewing his cud and looked after his comrades with a wild surprise in his big brown eyes. He stood on a little knoll, regarding the whole proceeding as if it were an entirely novel turn of affairs.

"Good-by, Bally," again said Arty, this time with a queer, choking sensation in his throat. Hi actually snuffled in his big bandanna handkerchief. Tom, by way of changing the subject, walked by Tige's head, and, looking into the eyes of that intelligent animal, said:

"Well! if there ain't a tear on Tige's nose! He's sorry to get shut of Bally, after all!"

"Oh, you talk too much," said Barney, testily.

So they left Bally looking after them as they climbed the ridge and disappeared behind Ancient Ruins Bluffs.

That very night, as if to supply the place of their lost friend, a new acquaintance came to their camp. It was a large mongrel dog, yellow as to color, compactly built, and with a fox-like head. Dogs were

not common on the plains. This waif had been running along the road alone for some days past. The boys had often seen him, and had supposed that he belonged to some train behind them. His feet were sore with travel, and he was evidently masterless.

"Poor fellow!" said Mont, pityingly. "Give me the arnica out of the medicine-chest, and I will fix some buckskin socks on his feet."

The dog accepted these kind attentions, and, as soon as he was let loose again, sat down and deliberately tore off his moccasins with his teeth. While he was licking his sore feet, Johnny, who had been out with Tom, gathering fuel on the bluffs, came in with a load on his back. He dropped his burden with an air of astonishment, and exclaimed:

"Bill Bunce's dog!"

"Sho!" said Hi. "What's his name?"

"Pete," replied the boy, who could hardly believe his eyes.

"Well, Pete," said Hi, "where's yer master? 'Cordin' to all accounts he's a bad egg. Pity that there dog can't talk."

But Pete had nothing to say. He shyly accepted Arthur's proffers of friendship, and from that moment became a regular member of the company.

"We've got such a lot of grub, I s'pose, we must needs take in a yaller dog to divide with," privately

grumbled Tom to his brother that night. "Reckon Arthur'll want to pick up a jackass rabbit for a pet, next thing you know."

"If you don't like it, sonny, you can go back, you know," replied Hi, who was cross and sleepy. Pete's position in the camp was assured.

A few days after this, while near Fort Laramie, they had a chance to dispose of their new friend. Just as they were camping, a party of mounted Indians, of the Brulé Sioux band, came galloping up to their tent. They were splendid fellows, dressed in the fullest and gayest costume of the Indian dandy. Their hair was loosely knotted behind and stuck full of brilliantly dyed feathers, which hung down their backs. Their buckskin leggings, moccasins, and hunting-frocks were covered with embroidery in colored quills, the handiwork of their squaws. Bright red blankets dangled down from their shoulders, and about their necks were hung strings of shells, beads, and bears' claws, with rude silver ornaments. Their faces were painted with red and yellow ochre, and one of them, the chief, wore a tortoise-shell plate over his decorated forehead, like the visor of a cap.

These gorgeous visitors sat stately on their horses, and regarded our young emigrants with an air of lofty disdain.

"How!" said Mont, who had been taught good

manners, if the Sioux had not. The chief grunted, "Ugh!" in reply to this customary salutation. Then he happened to see Pete.

"You sell him?" pointing to the dog.

"No, no," said Arthur, in a whisper. "Don't sell him, Mont. He wants to eat him, probably."

"No sell him," promptly replied Mont. "Good dog. We keep him."

Thus rebuffed, the Indians unbent somewhat from their dignity, and the chief, carefully extracting from a bead-worked pouch a bit of paper, handed it to Barnard with the remark, "You read um."

The paper proved to be a certificate from Indian Agent Thomans that the bearer was a peaceable Indian, "Big Partisan" by name, and that he and his band were not to be molested by white people whom they met. These dusky visitors, thus introduced, dismounted and stalked through the camp, saying nothing, but looking at everything with stolid gravity. While the rest were trying to make some conversation with the Indians, Arty climbed into the wagon to get out some provisions. While opening a flour-sack he saw the lid of the "feed-box," at the rear end of the wagon, in which were kept their small stores, cups and plates, raised from the outside by an unseen hand. Wondering at this, the boy softly worked his way toward the box, concealed by the raised cover. A

crest of plumes now nodded above the lid, and a soft rattle showed that some one was fingering the contents of the box. Placing both hands on the cover, which sloped toward him, Arty gave a sudden push and brought it down with a tremendous clatter. A superb-looking Indian stood revealed, having barely snatched his hands away as the box-cover slammed down.

"How!" he said, not in the least abashed. Then, raising the lid again and curiously examining the hinges, as if admiring their mechanism, he said: "Heap good! White man know everything."

"The white man knows too much to let you hook things out of his grub-box," said Arty, angrily.

The Indian smiled in the blandest manner, and joined his companions. The party stayed about the camp some time, as if waiting an invitation to sup with the white men. But entertainment for Indians was out of the question; there was not provision enough to spare any for visitors.

When they went away, Arty said, grumblingly, as he went on with his preparations for supper:

"Now I suppose I can turn my back on the wagon without something being stolen."

"Pooh! Arty thinks he is the only one who keeps watch," sneered Tom.

"If it hadn't been for me that big dandy Indian

would have carried off everything in the grub-box," returned the boy, who was cross, tired, and generally out of sorts. He was making a buffalo stew for supper and Barnard, coming up, looked into the camp-kettle.

"What! no potatoes?" he said, with a tone of disgust.

"No," replied Arthur, sharply. "No potatoes. We've only a precious few left. We've got to make the most of them."

"I wouldn't give a cent for a stew without potatoes," remonstrated Barnard.

"Nor I neither," joined in Tom, only too glad to see a little unpleasantness between the two brothers.

"Well, you'll have to eat a good many things that you don't like before we get through—'specially if I have to do the cooking. Barney Crogan thinks too much of what he eats, anyhow." This last shot Arty fired at his brother as Barney moved away without a word.

On the plains, where men are by themselves, little things like this sometimes seem to be very important. Men have quarrelled and fought like wild animals with each other over a dispute about flapjacks. Two old friends, on the emigrant trail, fought each other with knives because one had twitted the other with riding too often in the wagon.

Arthur went on with his cooking, feeling very un-

comfortable, as well as cross. They had had a weary day's drive, and all hands were fagged.

"The worst of it is, I have to work around this plaguey camp-stove, while the others can lop down and rest," grumbled poor Arty to himself, as he became more and more heated.

Running to the wagon for a spoon, after a while, Arty stooped and looked into the tent, where the bundles of blankets had been tumbled on the ground and left. Barney was lying on the heap, fast asleep, and with a tired, unhappy look on his handsome face. Arty paused and gazed, with a troubled feeling, at his brother lying there so unconscious and still. Barney had been sick, and the night before he had started up in his sleep crying "Mother!" much to Arty's alarm.

The boy regarded his brother for an instant with pity, as his uneasy sleeping attitude recalled home and home comforts. Then he went silently to the wagon, took out six of their slender stock of potatoes, pared and sliced them, and put them into the stew now bubbling in the camp-kettle. Nobody but Hi noticed this; and he only grinned, and said to himself, "Good boy!"

Afterward, when they had squatted about their rude supper-table, Barnard uncovered the pan containing the stew with an air of discontent. Glancing at Arty, with pleased surprise, he said:

"Why, you put in potatoes, after all!"

Arthur's cheeks reddened, as he said, as if by way of apology:

"Mont likes them, you know."

Mont laughed; and so did they all. After that, there was good humor in the camp.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE HEART OF THE CONTINENT

Fort Laramie was not a very interesting place to the boys. It hardly repaid them for the trouble they had in crossing the river to get to it. But here they found a store kept by an army sutler, and Mont said that he should really enjoy buying something, by way of proving to himself that he was in a spot where something besides Indian manufactures were for sale. Arty looked longingly on some dry, powdery figs and ancient candy which were among the sutler's stock in trade; but he compromised with himself and bought five cents' worth of aged raisins, which he generously divided with his comrades, Tom and Johnny.

They all very much admired the nicely dressed officers, who wore as fine uniforms, and "put on as many airs" (as Bush said) as if they lived among white folks. Then there were houses—real houses—finished with siding and painted white, and with stone chimneys. Some of these were used as officers' quarters, and some were barracks for the soldiers. These they examined

with curious interest. They had seen no houses for several weeks. This was a little village in the wilderness.

At the crossing of the South Platte, a few days after, the young emigrants found another trading-post. It was in a rude log hut on the bank of the stream; and a very queer stock of goods was crowded into it. There were pipes, mining tools, playing-cards, flour, bacon, sugar, boots and shoes, and even buttons, thread, and needles. But the prices! They were tremendous. Flour was twenty-five cents a pound; pipes were a dollar each; and a little glass tumbler of jam, which Tom very much hankered after, was two dollars and a half. Here, too, was a sort of news exchange; there were no newspapers, to be sure, except one well-worn paper from St. Louis, now more than two months old, carefully hung over a long string of buckskin, and not permitted to be handled by anybody. But the rough-bearded, uncouth men who lounged about the place picked up from the trader and half-breed assistant such points of information as had been left by those who had gone on ahead. They also left here messages for friends and acquaintances who were yet behind.

On the walls of this store in the waste of the continent were stuck bits of paper containing rude directions for emigrants. These were written by men

who had gone on ahead and had sent back some report of their experience. For instance, one scrap was:

35 miles from this post to Hoss Crik. Dont stop at Willer springs which it is no springs and feed mighty pore.

Right under this was another bulletin, which read:

Nigh 60 miles to Sweetwater—powerful bad road till you get to Independence Rock—blacksmith shop and tradin post—the traders a thief.

Some charitable person had rubbed "thief" from this notice, and had written in "good feller" instead; but both titles stayed there.

"You pays yer money and takes yer choice," said Bush, grimly, as he read this gazette. "But I'll bet the fust man was right."

Here, too, they learned that the ferryman at "Columbus," or the Loup Fork crossing, had been robbed.

"When was that?" asked Mont.

"I allow it was about the middle of June. Me and my pard we crossed there June the ten, and it was some time after that," explained a short, thick-set fellow, whom the boys had met before somewhere.

"Well, we passed there on the fifth of June," said Barnard. "Did the thieves get away with much money?"

"Nigh onto five hundred dollars, I've heard tell; but thar's no knowin'; it mought have been five thou-

sand. That mean skunk took in heaps of coin at the ferry."

"Does he suspect anybody?"

"Couldn't say; 'twas after I war thar. How's that, Dave?" said he, addressing another lounger.

"I came by there the day after the robbery," replied Dave. "Old Columbus was off on the trail of a couple of suspicious characters who had swam the fork with their horses, about four miles up stream. The boys at the ferry said the old man had a good description of the chaps whom they suspicioned. One of 'em had a hare-lip, and 'tother had a game leg."

"A game leg!" exclaimed Johnny. "That's Bill Bunce!"

"And who is Bill Bunce, my little kid?" asked the stranger, turning to the boy.

"Oh, he's a scaly feller that left this boy to shift for himself, away back on the river. But you ain't noways certain that this thief was Bill Bunce, Johnny, you know," said Hi.

The lounging emigrants were so much kindled by this bit of possible evidence in the Loup Fork robbery, information of which had slowly overtaken them here, that they gathered around and expressed their opinions very freely about Bill Bunce.

"He'll swing from the first tree he meets after some of us fellers finds him on the trail, now ye bet yer life," was one comment.

"Thar's nary tree between here and Bridger big enough to hang a man on, 'cordin' to them things," said another, waving his pipe toward the rude bulletins on the cabin wall. "See, nothin' but 'No wood' on 'em, from here to Salt Lake, so far as I kin see."

The boys, after this, did find a rough road, and they were glad enough that they were within reach of help. Rose's drove of cattle was drawn upon often for fresh recruits for the yoke. Here, too, they found the springs often poisoned with alkali. Some of the shallow pools were colored a dark brown with the alkali in the soil. Others were white about the edges with a dry powder which looked and tasted like saleratus. The cattle refused to drink the stuff; and now, along the track, they met a great many animals turned out to die, suffering from the effects of the alkali which they carelessly lapped up with their scanty feed. Here and there they met a few poor fellows limping along with all their possessions packed on their backs. These had lost their cattle, one by one, and had been obliged to abandon their wagons and baggage. Taking a sack of flour, a frying-pan, a few pieces of "side meat," or bacon, some coffee, and a tin cup, these courageous fellows went forward, determined to get through, somehow. Usually they managed to sell some part of their outfit. The rest they left by the side of the wagon-track. But, begging, borrowing, or

buying from day to day, they trudged on with their faces turned westward—always westward.

"Hello! what's that on that wagon?—'Or Bust'—and a gaudy old wagon it is," said Hi, one day.

The wagon was a two-wheeled affair, drawn by one yoke of oxen, and looking exactly like one-half of what might have been a long vehicle. On the canvas was painted the words "Or Bust," which had attracted Hi's attention.

This strange-looking craft was creeping along in the shadow of Independence Rock, when overtaken by our party. Barnard, recognizing the good-natured young fellow who was driving, said:

"What's happened to your wagon since we saw you at Council Bluffs?"

The man laughed lightly, and replied: "Well, you see, Jake and I, we couldn't agree with our pardners, Jake's brother Joe and Bill Jenness—so we divided."

"How? Divided everything?"

"Sartin, sartin. We couldn't go on without a wagon, you know. So we sawed the old thing in two. Thar was a ch'ice; the fore part had the tongue, and we played a game of seven-up for the ch'ice. Joe and Bill held over us—beat us by one p'int; and they've gone on with their share of the waggin."

"So your brother Joe has gone with the 'California'

part of your wagon?" said Mont, addressing Jake Russell, one of a quarrelsome family.

"That's about the size of it," surlily replied Jake. "It was 'Californy or Bust.' Joe and Bill have got the 'Californy' and we've got the 'Bust.' Howsoever, if you go round on the other side, you'll see we've got 'Californy' there, too. We've got the entire thing, but a feller has to go all around us to see it."

"Couldn't you agree about the road?" asked Hi, with some curiosity.

"No, it was beans."

"Beans?" said Hi, opening his eyes.

"Yes, beans," answered Jacob, growing angry. "I don't give in to no ornery half-baked sucker, even if he is my brother. An' when it comes to beans cooked in a ground oven, when wood is plenty, and you have time to dig yer oven and can spare yer camp-kettle long enough to bake 'em over night, I'm thar. But beans is better and more economical-like stewed. Leastways, I think so. Joe, he don't think so. Bill Jenness—well, he always was a pore shoat—he don't think so. So we divided the plunder and are going through. Gee! Lion!—whar be yer goin' to? The most obstinatest steer I ever see. Good day!"

And the men who preferred their beans stewed drove on.

Independence Rock was such a famous landmark

that our boys could not pass it without climbing it. The rock is an immense ledge, rising nearly one hundred feet from the ground; it is almost flat on top, and covers a space equal to an acre or two. All around it the country is undulating, but without any large rocks. Independence Rock looms up like a huge flat bowlder left there by mistake when the world was built. Resting their team, the party scrambled up the enormous mass. The top was worn by the flow of uncounted ages. Here and there were depressions in which little pools left by the late rains were standing; and all around on the smooth places of the rock were chiseled the names, or initials, of passing emigrants. Some of these were laboriously carved, some were painted with the soft tar which should have been saved to use on wagon-wheels. On the perpendicular wall of the rock, facing the west, was a roughly cut inscription setting forth how "Joshua F. Gibbonson, a native of Norway, aged 24 yrs," was buried near. Another gave the name and age of a young woman, also sleeping close at hand.

Arthur, walking over the multitude of letters inscribed on the top of the rock, suddenly paused, and, looking down at his feet, exclaimed: "Bill Bunce!"

The rest, hurrying up, saw on the rugged surface this inscription: W. BUNCE.

"But his name is Bill. That's a W," said Johnny,

gazing at the mysterious letters with a sort of fascination.

Mont and Barney laughed, and Arty said: "To be sure his name is Bill, but it was William before it was Bill, and so he spells it with a W."

"I don't believe it's Bill Bunce, anyhow," said Hi. "He wouldn't be such a fool as to leave his name like that here, where he knows people are looking for him."

Mont got down on his knees to inspect the letters, as if he thought they might give him some clue to the man who had carved them, and had then gone on, leaving this mute witness behind him. He shook his head, and said:

"I don't know, Hi. Guilty men, somehow, always drop something by which they can be traced. If he stole old Columbus's money, it is just as likely as not he would be foolish enough to put this here. Anyhow, I guess this is Bill Bunce's autograph."

Nothing positive came of the discussion, but Johnny lingered over the letters, and murmured to himself:

"If they could only tell, now!"

"But they are silent letters, Johnny," whispered Arty, who had stayed behind with his little mate. The boy laughed, without understanding why, and the youngsters left the inscription still staring up to the sky above the rock.

Passing Devil's Gate, and camping on the western side of that famous gap a few days after, the boys felt that they were at last in the Rocky Mountains. The Gate is a huge chasm, its black rocky walls towering up on either side. Westward is a grassy plain, dotted with trees, and affording a charming camping-ground. Here the young emigrants pitched their tent, in the midst of a mighty company. From a hundred camp-fires arose the odors of many suppers, and, as the sun went down behind the purple peaks, the cheerful groups made a pretty picture, framed by the blue and gray ledges, covered with vines, which stretched around the amphitheatre.

"That's a mighty knowin' dog of your'n," said a visitor lounging by the camp-stove and watching Arty cooking flapjacks.

"Yes," said Arty; "it's agreed that he is to have every flapjack that I lose when I toss 'em up—so;" and he tossed his pan dexterously in the air, and brought his flapjack down again in it, brown side up.

"Sometimes when the wind blows, I can't exactly calculate the force of it, and away goes the flapjack over on the ground. That's Pete's, and he goes for it before it lights. He can tell whether it will miss the pan or not."

"And I'll match Arty at tossing flapjacks with any grown man on the plains," said Hi, with a glow

of honest pride. "You bet that dog don't get many, 'cept when the wind blows variable-like."

Just then, Pete, who was assiduously gnawing a bone, ran to Arty, crying with pain, and put his head on the boy's knee. Arthur tenderly stroked the poor brute's jaw, and exclaimed:

"Poor old Pete! You see he has had a bad blow on the side of his head at some time. I think some of the small bones are broken. When he gets his jaw into a certain position, it hurts him confoundedly, and he runs to me. I found out that I could relieve him by softly pressing the place—so fashion. See!"

A sudden light gleamed in the man's face, and he said:

"I know that dog. I saw him back on the Platte with a couple of chaps—scamps I should say. One had a game leg, and I saw him bang that very identical dog with the butt of his gun, just because he scared up a big jack-rabbit. Powerful cruel it was."

"Aha!" said Barney. "That's Bill Bunce again. Where was this, stranger?"

"Well, I disremember now. But I allow it was on the other side of Chimney Rock, say about the latter part of June."

"That would give the thieves time to come up from Loup Fork," said Barney, who told their visitor the story of Bill Bunce and his companions. But the

stranger declared that the only companion of the man with the dog was a fellow with a hare-lip. He added:

"And I just believe that there dog got up and dusted out of that, he was treated so all-fired mean."

Soon after this, the emigrants entered the great passage through the mountains—South Pass. It was not easy to realize that they were actually going over the Rocky Mountains. The emigrant road gradually ascended the enormous ridge which forms the backbone of the continent—so gradually that the ascent was hardly noticed. To the north and south were grand peaks, purple in the distance, silvery with streaks of snow, and piercing the clouds. Nearer, the gray masses were broken into chasms, and were partly covered with a stunted growth of trees. As they pressed on, the road mounted higher and higher. But the way was easy, broad, and pleasant to travel. The nights were cold—so cold that the boys were thankful for the shelter of their tent; and they cowered under all the blankets and coverings they could collect. But the days were hot, and though the travelers might turn out in the morning air, their teeth chattering with cold, they marched along at noon perspiring in the sun.

Snow crept down nearer and nearer to their track, from up among the steep slopes which hung above the pass. While camping one day in this region, Captain Rose and some of our boys went up to the snow-banks

and had a July game of snow-ball. They brought back flowers gathered at the edge of the melting snow; and they reported butterflies and mosquitoes fluttering over the banks, as if brought to life by the dazzling sun. These reports seemed like travelers' tales, difficult of belief, but they were all verified to the satisfaction of the unbelievers.

One day, they reached a spring of which they had often heard. They approached it with a certain feeling of awe. It was on the dividing ridge of the continent. It was a boggy pool, rising out of a mass of rock and turf, trampled by many feet and spreading out into a considerable space. Some wayfarer had set up a rude sign-board, on which was inscribed the name —"Pacific Spring." Stepping from rock to rock, the boys made their way to the fountain-head, and silently gazed on the source of a stream that divided itself between the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Here the emigrant trail pitched abruptly down a rocky cañon to the west. The water flowing from the spring and saturating the grassy soil was parted by a low, sharp ledge of rock. From this, two little rivulets crept away, one to the east, one to the west. One gurgled down into the cañon, was joined by numberless runnels from the snow-peaks above, meandered away for many miles, sank into Green River, flowed south and west to the Colorado, entered the Gulf of California, and was lost in the Pacific. The other

slipped silently down the long slope by which the boy emigrants had come, joined itself to other tiny streams, and so, finding the far-off Missouri, by the way of the Yellowstone, reached the Mississippi, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic.

"Go, little stream," said Mont, "and tell the folks at home that we have left the old world. Boys! this is a new world before us now."

"We are on the down-hill grade," added Hi. "We can scoot to Californy now. Westward it is, and we are a-goin' with the stream."

Barney turned and looked back. "We are on the wall. Shall we go down on the other side, Arty?"

But Arty said: "I should be glad if I could send a message back to the folks at Sugar Grove. It would be like a message out of the sea. As long as we can't do that, suppose we follow the other stream to the Pacific?"

"We cannot be sentimental over this spring, my boy," said Mont, laughing. "But, as Hi says, we are going with the current now. That's it! Westward is the word!"

"Come on, boys!" shouted Captain Rose, from the down-hill road. "It's a rough drive yet to Sunset Cañon."

So the young fellows followed the stream, and turned their faces again to the west.

CHAPTER XIII

LAUGHTER AND TEARS

"WAUGH! how I hate hog-meat!" exclaimed Barnard, looking in his plate of fried bacon with an expression of extreme disgust.

"And no game since week before last," added Arthur, dolefully.

"When you can't get butter, you must make salt pork do, my old grandmother used to say," was Mont Morse's wise comment on this outbreak of discontent. "We enlisted for the campaign with hog-meat, boys, and you won't back out now, will you?"

"But we did reckon on more game, you know," argued Barney; "and we have had precious little since we got out of the antelope country."

"You disremember the dogs and frogs," said Hi, with a grimace.

Both the Stevens boys laughed. When they were in the prairie-dog region, they had killed and eaten all the animals they could get at. But Hi had steadfastly refused to "eat dog," as he expressed it, and his brother Tom had thought it necessary to follow his example.

It was in vain that Mont had urged that "prairie-dogs" were not dogs at all, but a kind of marmot; that they fed on roots and vegetables, and that their meat was as sweet and wholesome as that of rabbits.

"You needn't tell me," was Hi's constant reply. "They set up on end and bark just like dogs. They live with rattlesnakes and owls, and they are not fit for a white man to eat. Fremont may eat dogs, but I won't, until I'm starving."

His refusal to partake of this strange food, as he considered it, gave the others a larger share. The prairie-dogs, numerous though they were, were never plenty in the camp. They sat up cunningly on their haunches and barked at the hunters, very much in the squeaky fashion of toy-dogs; but, when shot at, they tumbled into their holes and were seldom recovered, even though severely wounded. They posted themselves by the opening of their dens, each one a sentinel to warn of danger. When they fell over, their comrades below dragged them into the burrow, where the young hunters could hear them whining and crying, in a half-human fashion, over their wounds. They were good to eat, but tender-hearted Arthur, much as he desired a change from their diet of "side-meat," never could take pleasure in killing the pretty little creatures.

As for frogs, when the party occasionally reached a pond of melted snow-water, warmed by the summer

sun and musical with frogs, Mont rolled up his trousers, and armed with a thick stick, waded in and slew them, right and left.

"But Boston folks consider them a great luxury," he remonstrated, when Hi and Tom expressed their profound disgust at such a proceeding. "Take off the hind-legs, skin them, and fry them—what can you want better?"

"Hog-meat," replied Hi, sententiously.

But it must be confessed that Hi looked on with interest while Mont and Barnard daintily nibbled at the delicate bones of the frogs' legs, nicely browned and having all the appearance of fried chicken.

"Stands to reason," muttered Hi, with his mouth watering, "that frogs is vermin, and vermin ain't fit to eat."

They were drawing near Salt Lake City now, and even the small game which Hi and Tom despised was no longer to be had. Occasionally they shot a hare, one of the long-eared, long-legged kind known as the jackass-rabbit. Sage-hens, too, had been plentiful in some localities, and though the flesh of these was dark and bitter with the wild sage on which they fed, the addition of a brace of them to their daily fare was a great event. Now, however, they were reduced to their staple of smoked "hog-meat" once more.

They had been lying by for a few days, hoping that

they might find some game while they recruited their stock. John Rose and Mont had scoured the country with their rifles, but they brought back nothing from their long tramps. Flour biscuit, fried salt meat, and coffee without milk formed their regular bill of fare now. The cows in the drove had ceased to give milk, and the boys were reduced to the "short commons" which they had been taught to expect.

Nevertheless, they were better provided than many emigrants whom they met on the way. A company of Germans, with whom they travelled, had nothing in their stores but smoked sausages, flour, and coffee.

"No sugar?" asked Arty, in amazement.

"Nein," civilly replied the genial German.

"No baking-powders? no salt?"

"Nein. No kraut," responded the traveler with gloom in his face.

Nevertheless, the light-hearted Germans had a merry camp. And, when they marched on by day, they locked arms over each other's shoulders, and kept step to the music of their own songs, singing as they went.

"Queer chaps those singing Dutchmen," mused Hi, as he watched them, day by day striding along and singing the marching-songs of their native land. The boys heard one of their favorite pieces so often that Mont caught the words and wrote them down. So

one day, to the astonishment of the rest of the party, Mont and Arty locked arms and marched down the trail, singing thus:

"Wohlauf in Gottes schöne Welt!
Ade! ade! ade!
Die Luft ist blau, und grün das Feld—
Ade! ade! ade!
Die Berge glüh'n wie Edelstein;
Ich wandre mit dem Sonnenschein
In's weite Land hinein.
Ade! ade!

"Du traute Stadt am Bergeshang,
Ade! ade! ade!
Du hoher Thurm, du Glockenklang,
Ade! ade! ade!
Ihr Häuser alle, wohl bekannt,
Noch einmal wink' ich mit der Hand,
Und nun seit abgewandt!
Ade! ade!

"An meinem Wege fliesst der Bach—
Ade! ade! ade!
Der ruft den letzten Grusz mir nach—
Ade! ade! ade!
Ach, Gott! da wird so eigen mir,
So milde weh'n die Lüfte hier,
Als wär's ein Grusz von dir—
Ade! ade!

"Ein Grusz von dir, du schlankes Kind—
Ade! ade! ade!
Doch nun den Berg hinab geschwind—
Ade! ade! ade!

Wer wandern will, der darf nicht steh'n,
Der darf niemals zurücke seh'n,
Musz immer weiter geh'n.
Ade! ade!"

"But that's Dutch!" exclaimed Hi. "Give us the English of it!"

"No; it's German," said Arty, laughing at his success as a "Singing Dutchman."

"What's the odds?" replied Hi. "It's as Dutch as Dutch kin be. I don't see no difference between Dutch and German."

"Well," said Mont, "we will give you the English of it some day." And when, not long after, Mont read his translation of the verses by the night camp-fire, the whole party were loud in their praises of their marching-song.

"It's a great thing to be a scholar," sighed Hi, with a glance of envy at the rude verses of the young "Boston feller." And he murmured, with a thrill of honest admiration: "That thar feller kin set a wagon-tire with any man on the plains. It do beat all how some folks is gifted!"

They overtook the "Singing Dutchmen," one bright day soon after this, and great was the delight of those sturdy trampers to see our boys marching by, sedately singing as they went Mont's free translation of their own song, something like this:

"Forward in God's beautiful world!
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
The sky is blue, and green the fields—
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
The mountains gleam like jewels bright;
I wander in the warm sunlight,
Far into distant lands.
Farewell! farewell!

"Dear village by the mountain-side,
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
Thou lofty tower, ye chiming bells,
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
Ye happy homes, well-known to me,
Toward you once more I wave my hand,
But turn away mine eyes!
Farewell! farewell!

"Beside my pathway flows the brook—
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
Which calls to me a last farewell—
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
Ah, Heaven above, so sad am I!
The zephyrs float so softly by,
As if they brought from thee a sigh—
Farewell! farewell!

"From thee a sigh, thou fairest maid!
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
But down the hillside now I speed—
Farewell! farewell! farewell!
For he who wanders must not pause,
Nor once behind him cast his glance,
But forward, forward march.
Farewell! farewell!"

"Ach! it is better as never vas," cried the honest Germans.

"Where get you so much good song, mine friendt?" asked one of the party, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm.

"We borrowed it from you," said Mont, modestly. "I hope you don't think us rude."

"Rudt? It is a what you call a gompliment, and we to you are much obliged," was the hearty reply.

"He did it, all by himself," said Hi, proudly. "He turned it into English from Dutch, and he sings it both ways like a reg'lar medder-lark—so he does."

"Yaw," answered the German emigrant, as if in doubt whether he understood Hi's explanations.

Barnard, not to be outdone, drilled Arthur and Tom in a marching-song of his own, and one day produced this novelty.

"When we lived in Vermont," said Barney, "there was a military company in our village. There were not men enough to make two companies, the place was so small. So the same men appeared as an infantry company one month, and as an artillery company the next. They had a snare drum and a bass drum when they turned out as infantry; but when they paraded as artillery, with one cannon, they had a spare man, so they used to carry two bass drums and the snare drum. This is the way the infantry band went." And

Barney got up and marched around the camp-fire, Arty and Tom following with—

"Boomer lacker! boomer lacker!
Boom! boom! boom!
Boomer lacker! boomer lacker!
Boom! boom! boom!"

Everybody laughed uproariously at the whimsical sight of the lads, who were half undressed for the night, as they paraded around and about, chanting the odd melody of the village drum-corps. Then, with solemn step and slow, they changed their marching-tune to the statelier music of the artillery band.

"Here go the two bass drums and the tenor," cried Arty.

"Boom dum dardy! Boom dum dardy!
How's your marm?
Boom dum dardy! Boom dum dardy!
How's your marm?
Oh, she's boozy, boozy, boozy, boozy!
Boom dum dardy! Boom dum dardy!"
&c., &c.

"Ho! ho! what nonsense!" roared Hi. "But it's just like a couple of bass drums. I think I hear 'em now"—and, lying back on his pile of blankets, Hi laughed again, Mont and the rest joining in the chorus.

The boys practised this marching-song as they had the others, and their fellow-travelers were often there-

after edified with the rough music which the party made as they stepped out with alacrity, chanting—

"Boomer lacker! boomer lacker!
Boom! boom! boom!"

Or they assumed a more funereal gait as they walked, and sung—

"Boom dum dardy! Boom dum dardy!
How's your marm?"

Their laughter was hushed when Nance, whose family had come up with them lately, marched up to their tent one night with the solemn announcement of "The baby's dead!"

"What baby?" they asked, with a startled air.

"Just like stoopid men-folks, you air!" replied the girl. But she added, with a softened tone: "Why, it's the Messer folkses baby. Them that was upsot in Dry Creek and had a lovely bonnit along."

"It was the sick baby that we tended down there just this side of Papeses, ye know, Arty," said Tom, with solemnity.

Old Mrs. Rose, Captain John's mother, who sat near by, said: "I knowed she'd never raise that there child. It allus was a weakly thing. It's a marcy it's took away now"—and the good old woman knocked the ashes out of her pipe, and sighed.

"Death in the camp," thought Barney to himself, and he looked around and wondered how it would seem if death was in their camp as it was in their neighbor's. His eyes rested lovingly on his brother's golden head, and he asked: "Can we be of any service, do you think, Nance?"

"I reckon. The baby's to be buried at sun-up to-morrow; and dad said if one of you fellers would go down to the mouth of the cañon with him to-night, he'd help dig a little grave." And the girl turned away to hide her tears as she uttered the words so full of sadness to all ears.

The boys eagerly volunteered to assist in everything that was to be done; and by the edge of a dry ravine, under a lone tree, they hollowed a little cell before they slept.

Next day, before the camps were broken up, all of the emigrants on the ground gathered about the wagon of the Messers, where a little white bundle was lying on a pile of yokes, covered smoothly with a blanket. On this white shape was laid a poor little knot of stunted cactus-flowers, the only blooming thing which the arid plains produced. Near by was the mother, crouched on the ground and moaning to herself: "Such a little thing!—such a little thing!"

"It's powerful rough to have to bury the baby out

yere in the wilderness-like," complained the father. "I wish I hadn't a-come."

"Don't take on so, ole man," said his wife. "He's better on't—he's better on't."

The youngest boys raised the burden at a signal from Captain Rose. They bore it to the open grave, all the company following with uncovered heads. Then the little white bundle was lowered tenderly into the earth. The tearful mother picked up the yellow cactus-flowers, which had fallen to the ground, kissed them, and cast them in. Then stout branches of sage-brush were laid over the figure beneath, forming a shelter from the soil.

A white-haired old man, the patriarch of one of the companies, lifted up his hands and prayed by the open grave. There was a stifled sigh here and there in the little assemblage when he spoke of "the loved ones left behind," and of others "who had gone on before." Then he said a few pleasant and cheery words to the mourning parents, who were leaving their only child here alone in the heart of the continent.

"And yet," he said, "not here, but up yonder," and he pointed upward, where Nance, whose wondering eye involuntarily followed the speaker's, saw a little bird cheerily winging its solitary way across the rosy sky. She plucked her mother's sleeve and whispered: "I'm so glad I picked them posies!"

A WHITE-HAIRED OLD MAN PRAYED BY THE OPEN GRAVE

The grave was filled up, the simple ceremony was over, and each party betook itself to preparing for another day's journey.

"Poor little thing!" said Mont. "Its journey is done early; and it rests just as well here as anywhere."

"I'm glad they buried it in the morning," added Arthur. "It is not nearly so sad as it is in the evening, when the shadows creep and creep, just as if they would never stop creeping. Seems to me it's a good thing to bury children at sunrise. I don't know why, though."

"Neither do I, Arty," said Hi; "but a buryin' is a solemn thing, for all that. I allow it's the solemnest thing a-goin'. I was a-thinkin' just now, when we was takin' down the tent, of a hymn my sister Pamely Ann used to sing. By gum, now! I've forgot the words, but they're powerful nice," added Hi, looking rather foolish. "Something about pitching your tent, anyhow."

"Oh, yes! I remember," said Arty, brightly; "it is this:

> " 'Here in the body pent,
> Absent from thee I roam,
> Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
> A day's march nearer home.' "

"That's it! that's it! Good boy, Arty!" said Hi, with shining eyes. "Now, d'yer know, I often have

them thar words a-buzzin' through my head when we set up the tent, nights, all along this yere trail?"

"So do I, Hi," answered Mont. "And so I do when we take it down next day, because, somehow, the place where we have spent even one night seems like home when we live out of doors, as it were, and go on, knowing we shall never see it again."

"Well, we're getting really sentimental, Mont," said Barnard, "and all along of that little funeral."

"I allow that a funeral, big or little, is the solemnest thing out. Whoa haw! Bally! whar in thunder are yer goin' ter?" And Hi drove on in the train that moved out of camp.

Nance trudged along in the dust behind the Missourian's wagon, holding on by one hand to the tailboard, by way of speechless sympathy. The poor mother sat looking out from the wagon cover as the team moved slowly away. She saw the deserted camping-ground, where a few dying fires were smoldering in ashes. She even marked the lame and worn-out steer that some emigrant had left behind, and which now stood looking wistfully after the departing train. But most she noted the little mound, fresh with yellow earth, and decently fenced about with broken wagon-tires, by the lone tree. The morning sun gilded the small heap of soil and deluged all the plain with unsupportable brightness. She shaded her eyes with her

hand and moaned: "Such a little thing!—such a little thing!"

Nance's brown hand closed tenderly on the woman's gown, and a few gracious tears dropped in the dust as she walked.

CHAPTER XIV

IN MORMONDOM

THE way now grew more and more crowded. It seemed as if the teams sprang out of the earth, they were so numerous, and they collected on the trail so suddenly day by day. Desperate characters, too, became more frequent as the tide of emigration drew near the city of the Great Salt Lake. There was much talk about hostile Indians. The boys had heard this before, when passing through the Rocky Mountains. Once or twice, they knew of Indian attacks before or behind them; and one day they had overtaken a party of emigrants who had lost three of their party during one of these attacks. They saw, with their own eyes, the bullet-holes in the wagons of this company, and they had helped to bury the men left dead on the ground, after the firing was over and the cowardly Indians were gone.

During that exciting and alarming time, they had mounted guard every night with the full belief that they might be fired upon before morning. The cattle were kept near the camp, and the wagons were placed

close together, so that, in case of an attack, they could be arranged in the form of a circle, like a fort. In those days, while in a hostile country, they had plenty of company for mutual assistance, however, and they almost lost the pleasant little privacy of their own camp. They travelled with a crowd; they camped with a crowd. Nance's father, Philo Dobbs, and her mother, and Nance herself, formed one small party; and they were glad to keep along with the Roses and our boys, for the sake of better security from danger.

Now there were rumors of the Goshoots being about, and as the Goshoots were a marauding tribe of Indians, though not so warlike as the Cheyennes, then very unfriendly, the emigrants were uneasy. Between Fort Bridger and Salt Lake City was a very bad section of road. The country was sandy and dry. Here and there were springs of poisonous water, and the undulating surface of the ground was dotted with clumps of grease-weed and sage-brush; there was nothing for the animals to feed on, and no water fit to drink. To get through this desolate region the emigrants travelled night and day or, rather, one day and one night.

The moon was nearly at the full, and the night was pleasant and cool. As they drove on through the shadowy hollows and over the ghostly ridges, in the moonlight, utterly in the wilderness, even the cattle seemed to think something unusual was going forward.

Tige turned his head every now and then, and looked at Arthur, as much as to say: "Queer doings these, my boy." And Pete, who never barked except on great occasions, stalked along by the side of the team, growling with suppressed excitement. Everybody felt nervous and "scary," as Bush expressed it, but very little was said, and the company swept on, wagon after wagon, bands of cattle, men on foot and men on horseback, silently pressing on in the night, in the midst of a wild, strange country, with danger lurking near and an unknown and untrodden space before them.

About midnight, when the men were beginning to feel drowsy, when the women had climbed into the wagons to sleep, and the cattle showed their fatigue by lagging, a sudden panic seized the whole line. Instantly, the loose cattle darted off in all directions, to the right and left of the road, scampering among the bushes, with their tails in the air. The teams followed them, jolting and bouncing the wagons over the hillocks and rough ground, and shaking out the women and children, who fell screaming and terrified. All along the line were confusion and dismay. The men yelled at their cattle, but in vain. The animals ran like mad buffaloes, and careered through the sagebrush pursued by their drivers, who could neither stop nor turn them.

The ground was speedily strewn with camp-stuff,

loose garments, and mining "traps." Here and there, a wagon was overturned, and the frantic oxen dragged it a little way and then stopped in sullen despair. Tige and Molly joined in the general stampede, and Arthur and Hi breathlessly pursued, Barnard having tumbled out of the rear end of the wagon, where he had been taking a nap. As Arty caught up with the team and ran around their heads to turn them back, he suddenly saw a dusky figure rise up from behind a wild sage-bush, within a few feet of him. He felt his hair rising on his head, and he instinctively reached behind him for his revolver. It was gone!

Just then the figure stumbled and fell, rose again, and said:

"I just allow this yere is the ornerest, toughest piece of ground I ever travelled."

It was Messer, whose team had disappeared in the struggling mass which had now gathered at the foot of a rise of ground. Arty breathed freer, and, with Mont's help, he and Hi quieted their oxen, stopped them, and began to look about.

The long procession, which had been moving along so quietly and steadily a few minutes before, was now broken and scattered in all directions. Some of the loose cattle had disappeared in the darkness, and not a few wagons lay overturned and half-wrecked among the bushes. People went wandering around seeking

for their comrades or gathering up their goods and animals. But the panic was over.

"It was only a stampede, after all, Arty," said Hi, cheerily.

"Well, if that's a stampede, I allow I don't want any more of 'em," said Tom, with his teeth still chattering. "I own up that I was orful scared. Wha'—wha's that?" he exclaimed, starting back as he spoke.

"Nothin', nothin'; ye're scart of yer own shadder," replied Hi, who looked in the direction of Tom's fears, but with a little shake in his voice.

It was only Johnny, who was hunting about in the brush for Arty's pistol.

"Come out of that thar brush, you young one," remonstrated Hi, with some asperity, as he began to straighten out the team before driving back to the road. "'Spos'n' yer'd be ketched by the Goshoots, who'd hev yer share of the outfit, I'd like to know? Haw there, you Tige!"

"D'yer 'spose there's Injuns about, Hi?" said Tom.

"Couldn't say—couldn't say, Tom. Mont here allows that Injuns hev a way of stampedin' a train like that and then firing into the crowd and pickin' off the heft of 'em."

"Yes," exclaimed Mont, "they say that the Indians would sometimes scare cattle and make them stampede

in that way, and then fall on the disordered train and destroy the people and capture the property. But we have seen no Indians. They had a chance to attack us just now, if they wanted to."

"Well, then, why did the cattle all run like that?" demanded Arthur. "They must have been scared by something."

"I just allow it was shadders. The cattle were skittish and scary-like," said Hi. "And I must say I was sorter panicky myself, before the stampede began. Shadders creeping alongside of the road, shadders stealing along behind in the moonlight. Ouch! what's that?"

Everybody started, and then everybody laughed. It was Pete, who came bounding in from the sage-brush with Barney's cap, which he had picked up somewhere. Barney had not missed his cap—he had been so taken by surprise when he was shaken out of the wagon. Arty picked up his pistol near where the stampede began, and, after recovering the other things scattered along the path of their erratic flight, they went back to the road. Many hands make light work; the overturned wagons were righted, the cattle were gathered in, and the train moved on once more. As usual, however, the panic-stricken oxen did not easily recover their calmness. Once again in the course of the night, terrified by the weird shadows, perhaps, they bolted

from the track; but they were soon brought back, and they plodded on until daybreak.

In a short time after this great scare, the young emigrants passed into Echo Cañon, then a famous resting-place for the gold-seekers. High walls of red, yellow, and cream-colored rock rose on either side. These walls were topped out with pinnacles, towers, and steeples. It was like a fairy scene. Below were charming groves, overshadowing a winding stream. Above were fantastic rocky shapes, resembling castles, donjon-keeps, cathedral spires, battlements, and massive walls. Trailing vines grew in the high crevices of the precipices and swung in the breeze. The cañon was rich with grass and wild berries, and here the boys camped for several days, trying curious experiments in cooking the fruit which grew so abundantly about them. "Sass," as Hi called it, was the easiest to manage. They made a few pies, too; but the pastry was made with bacon fat and lard, and Barnard turned up his nose at it, with the remark that "it was hog-meat in another shape."

They attempted a berry pudding, and Nance lent them a cloth to boil it in. Arty would not permit the cover of the camp-kettle to be taken off, as that would "make the pudding heavy." Nance had said so. When the hungry company gathered about the kettle, at dinner-time, to see that famous pudding taken out,

Arthur poked around in a thin purple broth with his stick only to fish out an unpleasant-looking and limp cloth. The bag had been tied too tight. The pudding had burst, and was now a porridge of flour, water, and "sarvice-berries."

"I allow the proof of that pudd'n' ain't in the eatin' of it," solemnly remarked Hi.

But Nance consoled Arty by informing him that this was an accident which happened to the very smartest folks, sometimes.

"It ain't nigh so bad as scaldin' yer bread, Arty," said the girl, with a slight laugh.

When they reached the mouth of Emigrant Cañon, a few days later, one fine August morning, they gazed with admiration upon the city in the wilderness—Great Salt Lake City. The cañon opened to the west, high up among the mountains. Below the boys stretched the broad valley north and south. Above their heads rose snowy peaks; beneath was a vast plain, belted with winding streams, and green and gold with grass, orchards, and grain-fields. In the midst of this lovely panorama shone the City of the Saints. It was like a fairy city. It seemed like a dream. Nearly three months had passed since they had seen a town, and here was a great, well-built and beautiful city. The houses were neutral-tinted or whitewashed, the roofs were red, and innumerable trees embowered

the whole. The plain, in the midst of which the city was set like a jewel, rolled far to the westward, where it was bounded by the shining waters of Great Salt Lake. Beyond this towered a range of purple mountains, their sharp peaks laced with silvery snow.

"This is a view from the Delectable Mountains!" murmured Mont, as he sat down.

"Putty as a picter," said honest Hi, leaning on his whip-stock, and gazing at the wonderful panorama. "But it reminds me of the hymn—

> 'Where every prospect pleases,
> And only man is vile.'

They do say them Mormons will steal like all possest."

It was a difficult and a zigzag road down the mountain-side. Many a wrecked emigrant-wagon lay by the side of the descent, now continually crowded with the trains of the gold-seekers. At one place, looking over a low natural parapet, they saw a wagon and four oxen, lying in a heap of ruins, just where they had fallen from the dizzy height above. So, with much trembling and anxiety, they crept down by rocky slopes, beetling precipices, and foamy mountain-torrents, and reached the grassy plain at last. Here was comfort—an easy road, plenty of feed and water for the cattle, and fruit and vegetables growing in the neat farms by which they passed. It was like paradise.

Driving into the city, which was only a huge village, with orchards and grain-fields all about, they were directed to an open square where emigrants were allowed to camp. Fresh meat, vegetables, and new flour were to be had here, and in these unaccustomed luxuries the boys reveled with great delight. It seemed as if they were near their journey's end. The mishaps, discomforts, and perils through which they had passed, seemed far away now. Here were flower gardens, people living in houses, and here were families abiding, not camping out for a night. The tent of the emigrants, which had become their home, almost beloved as such, appeared frail and shadowy by the side of these substantial and comfortable houses, in which people actually lived.

"We must get up and dust out of this. I'm homesick," was Hi's plaintive remark.

"Lor!" said Nance, whose family was on the spot when they drove into town. "Lor! the wimmen is orful ornery. So old-fashioned, you can't think! Nothin' but sun-bunnits and caliker gownds. I ain't seen a sunshade since I've bin here. Ugh! such a place, I want to git."

The boys thought that they never could "git," when they woke up one fine morning, and found their cattle gone. They had been chained to the wheels of the wagon when they "turned in" to sleep the night

before. Mont had waked in the night and heard Bally, who was a restless creature, chafing with his chain. Now they were gone!

They looked in blank amazement, wondering how the thieves could have taken them away without disturbing anybody. It was useless to look for tracks. The turf was trodden by numerous hoofs, coming and going.

"Where's that rascal Pete that he didn't bark? If there had been a chipmunk about the camp, he'd have wakened up everybody," stormed Barnard, with great anger.

"Sure enough, where's Pete?" asked Arthur. He was not to be seen. The boy whistled for his old friend, but had no response. Pete had disappeared.

This was a great calamity, and, leaving the younger ones to get breakfast and watch the camp, Mont, Hi, and Barnard went out to look for the stolen cattle. They came back, late in the morning, one after another, without tidings. Everybody had told them that the Mormons would steal the tires off the wagon-wheels; that it was more dangerous here than in the Indian country; and then, there were dreadful rumors of emigrants—"Gentiles" the Mormons called them—disappearing suddenly and never being heard of again. If strangers made trouble about being robbed, they were quietly "put out of the way," nobody knew how.

The boys looked at the useless yokes, left piled on each other by the wagon, thought of their stolen cattle, and sat down to a very gloomy breakfast. Sympathizing friends and acquaintances from neighboring camps came in with offers of help, but they could not give up all hope of finding their own again. Arty confessed to himself that he rather enjoyed the celebrity which the affair gave his party, though he was not pleased when some rough stranger laughed at "the youngsters who had their cattle stolen from under their blankets while they slept." And next day, after they had spent one whole day in hunting for their stock, they heard that another party, on the west side of the city, had been robbed of a horse and three yoke of cattle.

Mont went to a Mormon justice of the peace and stated his case. He was received with great grimness, and a constable was sent down to the camp. This official looked at the wagon, tent, and camp-stove, asked if they had any tea to sell, and went away. They never saw him again.

On the third day, Mont, Hi, and Arthur were prowling about on the outskirts of the city, where the settlement melted away into small farms. The boy had strayed away from his companions, and was attracted by a neat little cottage built of adobe, or sun-dried brick. The roof was of thatch, and in the trim door-yard bloomed marigolds, hollyhocks, larkspur, and other

old-fashioned flowers. A cat purred in the sun, and a flock of white-haired children played on the low door-step.

"This seems like home," murmured the poor, dispirited and lonesome boy.

A sad-looking, sallow-faced woman, coming to the door, said: "Would you like to come in among the posies, my lad?"

"No, I thank you, ma'am," civilly replied Arthur. "But I should like a sprig of that lavender, if you can spare it."

As the boy spoke a short, sharp bark, strangely like Pete's, sounded from the house. He heard a man's voice, then a whine, and, as the woman gave him the spray of lavender, a low-browed, dark-faced man put his head out of the window, and said:

"What are you tolling these tramps about the place for? Get out of here!"

Two more sad-looking and sallow-faced women now appeared in the doorway, and Arthur walked away, half angry, but murmuring to himself:

"That man's a Mormon! Those are his wives!"

This discovery aroused the boy from his gloomy thoughts, and his curiosity was stirred to find out how a man with at least three wives could live. Loitering down a lane by the side of the cottage, he passed by a neat hedge which enclosed a paddock behind the

house. He stooped in an aimless way and peered through an opening in the bottom of the hedge. The enclosure was about fifty feet long and twenty-five wide. The upper end was bounded by a paling which separated the Mormon's garden from the paddock. The lower end opened, by a pair of bars, covered with cut boughs, on a common, unenclosed space. In the middle of this cattle-yard, quietly chewing their cuds, were eight or ten cattle. Among them, to his amazement, Arthur recognized Tige, Molly, Star, and his mate.

Scarcely believing his eyes, Arty looked once more, and then bounded away across the fields and over the ditches to find Hi and Mont. They were sitting disconsolately by some wild raspberry bushes, making a poor pretence of picking the fruit, when Arty rushed up, his eyes sparkling, his face all in a glow, and his breath coming and going fast.

"What luck?" exclaimed Mont, whose quick eye saw that something had happened.

"Found 'em!—found 'em!" panted the boy. "The whole lot are together in that corral with the hedge around it!"

"Gosh all Friday!" said Hi.

The three boys now walked rapidly back in the direction of the adobe house, which was about a mile off, but in plain sight. Arriving at the opening in the

rear of the paddock, they reconnoitered through the brush which had been ingeniously twisted into the bars so that the hedge, from the outside, seemed continuous.

"There's Tige, and Molly, and all hands," whispered Hi, with glistening eyes.

"We've two pistols among us. Let's march boldly in and drive them out," said Mont.

Without a word, Hi tore out the screen of boughs, let down the bars, and strode in. Just then, the back-door of the house opened and the dark-faced man appeared.

"Get out of that corral, or I'll shoot you!" he cried, and he raised a fowling-piece to his shoulder as he spoke.

"Don't be afeard, boys; it ain't loaded!" called one of the sad-looking women, who suddenly came around the corner of the house. The man muttered an oath, and pursued her as she disappeared among the holly-hocks.

The boys hastily separated their cattle from the rest, and drove them down the paddock. Just then, the man, who had run around the hedge, appeared at the opening and began to put up the bars.

"Leave those cattle alone," said he, savagely.

"They're our cattle, and we are goin' to take 'em," was Hi's dogged reply.

The man went on putting up the bars. Then Mont

"GET OUT OF THAT CORRAL OR I'LL SHOOT YOU!" HE CRIED

drew his pistol, and, pointing it directly at the fellow's head, said:

"Put down those bars, or I'll shoot you! Now then: One!—two!—three!"

The man turned and fled.

Arty ran down, dropped the bars, and the cattle passed out. The opening was closed behind them, and the little party, triumphant, but not without fears, took their way back to town. They were received at the camp with great acclamations, Barnard having returned in the worst possible spirits. The neighboring emigrants gathered in to congratulate them on their good luck, as well as their pluck.

"But suppose that chap takes it into his head to come down on us with legal documents, constables, and things!" said Barnard.

Captain John Rose took up his favorite rifle, which was lying in the sun, and remarked:

"If thar's Mormons enough in this yere city to capture the gang of Gentiles lyin' around loose in this yere square, let 'em come on. No better fun than that fur me!"

As a matter of precaution, however, it was thought best to get out of town as soon as possible. The few necessary purchases had been made. Letters were written home; and, yoking up their recovered team, they hastily departed out of the city.

The affair had been noised about, and several Mormons came around them as they drove away, threatening dreadful things. The dark-faced man did not appear. "If he wants his property, let him come and take it," said Hi. Strange to say he did not come. The emigrants were numerous, lawless, and angry.

The boys drove out to the north and west, their road leading them by a cluster of boiling hot springs, across the Weber, and so on to Box Elder. The first part of their way was through broad fields thick with grass and yellow with wild flowers. Across these they saw the City of the Saints, now no longer attractive, recede as they drove away. Something came bounding toward them across the grassy plain, now lost in the tall growth, and now springing into the streams which laced the plain. It seemed an animal, and yet it appeared like a man running on all fours with marvellous swiftness. It came from the direction of an adobe house on the edge of the city, in the midst of the fields. As it leaped nearer and nearer, it gave a joyful bark.

"It's Pete! it's Pete!" cried Arthur, and his tears must needs flow. In another instant, Pete, with a ragged rope about his neck, was in Arty's arms, on Hi's back, on Barnard's neck, and knocking little Johnny over in his paroxysm of delight.

"Whar hev yer b'en, ole feller?" asked Hi. "What a powerful shame it is that yer can't talk!"

"I just believe that the man who stole the cattle took Pete away," said Arthur. "I was sure I heard him in that house. He heard me outside talking with the woman, and he barked."

"But how could he get Pete away without poisoning him?" demanded Mont.

"Drugged him," suggested Hi.

"There's that knowing old Tige," said Arthur playfully. "He looks around as if he could tell all about it."

But he never did.

CHAPTER XV

A GREAT DISASTER

After leaving Salt Lake Valley, the young emigrants passed into a wild, desolate, and barren region. Immediately outside of the Mormon settlements, they found a most miserable country. The surface of the earth was red and dusty—"red hot," Hi said. No grass grew except in small dry bunches, and the pools of water were thick and brown with alkali, or they were boiling hot with hidden fires. Some of them rushed out of their fountains with a hurrying and hissing noise that reminded the boys of a steamboat. Others were bluish pools of water, with clean and pebbly bottoms, and just warm enough to be comfortable for a bath. Into these the weary and dusty travelers plunged themselves with great content. The waters seemed to be healing, they were so soft and pleasant to joints stiffened by long marches, and to skins made rough and sore by many days of travel on alkali plains. The air was still loaded with the alkali dust, like fine saleratus, which floated everywhere. But the natural hot baths, steel blue in their depths and gurgling

over stones covered with some kind of white mineral deposit, were luxurious beyond anything they had ever dreamed of.

Some of these hot springs were so near the cold ones, that the boys tried experiments of dipping their hands into a pool of cold water while their feet dabbled in warm water, as they lay along the ground. Once they came to a huge round pool, nearly fifty feet across, black, still, and with neither outlet nor inlet. Yet it was not stagnant; a slight current showed that there was some sort of movement going on beneath the surface.

"I allow this yer pool runs down inter the bowels of the yearth," said Philo Dobbs, pensively, as he stood on the brink and gazed into the mysterious depths.

"Well, ain't the bowels of the earth deep enough to take down this hull pool at one swaller, if so be as it runs down so fur?" asked Bush, with some impatience. "Stands to reason it would be all drawed off to oncet, if the bottom was clean dropped out."

"Anyway, there is no bottom," said Arty. "Lots of people have sounded it and found none."

But Philo Dobbs was firm in his opinion that the pool led directly into the centre of the earth; and Nance, as a dutiful daughter, informed the boys that what her father did not know about such things was not worth knowing.

They passed out from this region of wonders and traversed an exceedingly dull and uninteresting tract of country, lying between Salt Lake Valley and the headwaters of the Humboldt River.

About three weeks' march from the Mormon capital, late in August, they reached the Goose Creek Mountains. Here good pasturage was found by selecting spots along the creek, and here, too, the road became more easy for the cattle, many of which were weak and sick with the effects of alkali. Passing down through Thousand Spring Valley, the emigrants camped at the head of a rocky cañon, one night, two or three companies being together. The ground was dotted with scrubby knots of wild sage, grease-weed, and cactus. The soil was red, gray, and pebbly; but a small stream slipped through a gully near by, and along its banks grew a scanty crop of grass, well browsed off by the innumerable cattle which had passed on the way to California.

"This is awful lonesome," sighed Arty, as he wearily went through the usual and monotonous task of getting supper.

"Doesn't pay, does it, Arty?" said his brother, curiously watching the boy, with half-closed eyes, as he turned his sizzling bacon in the frying-pan, and kept his fire going with handfuls of dry weeds, their only fuel.

"No, Crogan, it does not pay. I'm getting clean beat out. And there's poor old Pete, licking his paws again. I can't keep shoes on that dog's feet, and he has worn the skin off of them so that he can hardly walk. Heigho! I wonder what mother would say to this mess?"—and Arty, with great disgust, stirred in the flour which was to thicken the bacon fat and make "dope" to eat with bread, instead of butter.

The thought of what his mother might say brought tears to the boy's eyes. This was Saturday night. Away off in the groves of the valley of the Rock his mother was drawing the New England brown bread and beans from the brick oven. His father, perhaps, was sitting by the fading light in the doorway, looking westward and thinking of his wandering boys. His brothers were out at the well-curb, dipping their heads into the water-trough with much rough play, and making ready for their welcome Sunday rest.

Here was a wilderness, a desert, scanty fare, and with the Land of Gold still a long way off.

"Hullo! there's a drop of salt water running down your nose, Arty," cried Tom, "and if it drops into that dope, you'll——"

But Tom never finished his sentence, for at that moment Mont, with righteous indignation, knocked him off the roll of blankets on which he had been sitting.

"Yer might let a feller know when you was a-comin' for him," said Tom, wrathfully, as he scrambled out of the way.

"Sarved yer right, yer grinnin' chessie-cat," said Hi.

"Yer'll never keep yer mouth shut. Now hustle that thar coffee-pot onto the table, and we'll sit by."

"Tom, I beg yer pardon," spoke up Mont Morse. "I really didn't intend to knock you over, only just to give you a gentle poke by way of reminder."

Tom sullenly ate his supper, without any comment on his brother's remark that he was an "ornery blatherskite, anyway."

Somehow the evening was more gloomy and cheerless than usual; and, as it was now necessary to keep a sharp watch for thieves who were prowling about the trail, those who were to go out on the second watch went early to their blankets. The rest took their several stations about the edge of the camp.

It was a little past midnight when the sleeping boys were awakened by a shot, and the voice of John Rose crying, "Stop that man!"

Barnard broke out of the tent with a wild rush, cocking his pistol as he ran through the low brush in which the camp was set. In the cloudy night he saw a light sorrel horse running close by the side of Old Jim, and coming toward him. As the horses passed swiftly across his vision, he saw a man rise and fall,

and rise and fall again in the sage-brush—rise and fall and disappear in the darkness.

Pursuing him was John Rose, his tall figure and bright red shirt showing conspicuously in the gloom. Barney ran on, but the fugitive was gone, and Rose came back, excitedly saying:

"Dog on that chap! I just believe I winged him. Did you see him limp?"

Barney was not sure that he limped, but was burning to know what it was all about.

"I was sittin' behind that thar rock," said Rose, "a-wondering about them stars just peekin' out of the clouds, when I heern a cracklin' in the bush and if thar wa'n't a yaller hoss—a strange hoss—sidlin' up, queer-like, as if somebody was leadin' him. I seen no man, no lariat onto the hoss, when he gets up alongside of Old Jim. Then he stops short, and then I seen a man's legs on the off-side and just in range of the sorrel's. I slid down from behind the rock and crep' along on the ground like, holding my rifle steady, when, all at once, the chap jumps up on the sorrel and away he kited pullin' Old Jim after him."

"Yes! yes! and you fired then?"

"Fired! Well, I just allow I did, and you should have seen that chap drop. But he got away, and we have got his hoss—that's all."

Sure enough, the sorrel horse was found to have a

lariat, or halter, of twisted raw-hide about his neck, one end of which had been knotted into Jim's halter. There was great excitement in the camp as the emigrants woke and came out to see "what was up." Here was the evidence of horse-thieves being about, and the men expressed themselves as being in favor of hanging the rascal—if he could be caught.

"Ouch!" cried Barney suddenly, sitting down. "Bring a light, Johnny."

Barney's bare feet were filled with the prickly spines of the ground cactus.

"Strange I never felt them until just now, and I must have clipped it through that whole bed of cactus plants."

But he felt them now, and, what was more, he was lame for a week afterward.

Next morning, on examining the ground, the boys discovered the tracks of the strange horse, where, coming up to the regular trail from the north, they crossed a damp patch of alkali earth, breaking in the crust which forms on top when the heat of the sun evaporates the alkali water. Nearer the camps the tracks were lost in the confused beating of the feet of many passing animals. But in the sage-brush, where Captain Rose had fired at the horse-thief, the foot-prints were plainly seen.

In the loose sandy soil beyond were the tracks of a

man, left in the dry surface; and on the twigs of a low grease-wood bush they saw a few drops of blood.

"Yes, yes, he was wounded. I was sure of that," cried Rose.

"And here is where he limped," said Hi, dropping on his knees and examining the foot-prints in the light gray soil. "Come yere, Mont, and tell us what you think of these yere. See! thar's a print set squar' down; then here's one that's only light-like, just half made."

Mont got down on his knees and followed the tracks along. The man had fled in great haste. Sometimes he had gone over the bushes, sometimes he had lighted in the midst of one. But, here and there, was a print, sometimes of the right foot, sometimes of the left; but one was always lightly made—"half-made," as Hi said.

"That man limped, sure enough," said Mont, finally. "But I guess he didn't limp from a wound, though he may have been wounded. I should say that he had a game leg."

"A game leg!" repeated Johnny and Arty together.

"I allow you're right, Monty, my boy," said Hi, who had been stooping again over the mysterious foot-prints. "That thar man had a game leg, for sure."

"Which leg was Bill Bunce lame of, Johnny?" demanded Barnard.

"The left leg," replied the lad.

Arty looked up triumphantly from the ground and exclaimed:

"So was this man that tried to steal Old Jim."

"It was Bill Bunce! It was Bill Bunce! I'm sure it was," cried little Johnny, in great excitement.

He looked at the foot-prints of the fugitive horse-thief, and fairly trembled with apprehension; he could not have told why.

"O! sho!" said Hi. "You mustn't think that every game-legged man you meet on the plains is Bill Bunce. Why, thar was that feller that picked up Barney's boots when they fell out of the wagon, down at Pilot Springs. He wa'n't no Bill Bunce, and he was the game-leggedest man I ever seen."

"If he had not been too game-legged to wear those boots, I am not so sure that Crogan would have seen them again," laughed Mont.

"Well, boys, thar's nothin' more to be l'arned of them foot-prints," said Hi. "We may as well get breakfast and be off."

"But this is Sunday," said Barnard.

"Yes," replied Hi, "Sunday and no feed and no water. Camp here all day and starve the critters? Not much."

"But we have never travelled Sundays," remonstrated Mont.

"Oh, yes, we did, Mont," interposed Arty. "Once before, at Stony Point, you know we had to when there was no grass; and we travelled from the Salt Lick to Deep Creek on Sunday, because we had no water."

"Which is the Christianest, Mont,—to let the cattle go without feed, or travel Sunday?" asked Hi.

"I don't know. I give up that conundrum."

"So do I," said Hi, with a grin.

They went on, however. Leaving Thousand Spring Valley, and crossing several rocky ridges, they descended and entered a long, narrow cañon, through which flowed a considerable stream.

Precipitous walls of rock rose up on either side, leaving barely room for the narrow wagon-trail and the creek. The trail crossed and recrossed the stream many times, and the fording-places were not all safe or convenient. But the day was bright and pleasant, and high, high above their heads, above the beetling crags, the blue sky looked cool and tender.

A long train passed down the cañon, the procession being strung out with numerous companies of emigrants. They had got half-way through the passage, which was several miles long, when, late in the afternoon, the sky grew overcast, and thick clouds gathered suddenly in the west.

"An awkward place to get caught in a shower," mut-

tered Captain Wise. "Thar's poor crossing at the best of times, and if this yere creek should rise, we'd be cut off in the midst of the cañon."

"But there is no danger of that, John, is there?" said Mont, who was striding along with the captain.

"Couldn't say, Mont. These yere creeks do swell up dreffle sudd'n, sometimes." And he anxiously regarded the sky, from which a heavy shower now began to fall.

The boys lightly laughed at the discomfort. They were used to it, and, wrapping their heavy coats about their shoulders, they plodded on in the pouring rain.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and the shower increased with such force that Hi, who was behind with the team, shouted to Captain Wise:

"Say, hadn't we better lay by? Yere's a place whar we can turn in and let the others pass us."

"The cattle's necks are getting chafed with their yokes," cried Tom, who particularly disliked getting wet.

"We must drive on until we're out of this yere cañon," was the captain's only reply.

And they pressed on in the midst of a tempest of rain. The sky overhead was only a narrow patch between the frowning walls of the cañon. It was as black as ink.

They had now reached a sharp bend in the cañon; a huge elbow in the rocky precipice at the left of the

track came down and made a deep recess just beyond it, where the trail turned in to the left. On the right was the creek, now foaming along in its stony bed, and on the opposite side was a sheer wall of rock rising into the low-hung clouds.

As they struggled around the corner of the rock and entered a little elevated place, where the cañon widened, the tall angle behind them shut out the trail down which they had just passed. Arthur, hearing a strange whirring noise in the air, looked back and up the cañon. He saw an inky black mass, tremendous and tumbling over and over, drift helplessly over the wall of the cañon, like a huge balloon. It struck the opposite wall, and in an instant the solid rock seemed to burst in cataracts of water.

Suddenly the air was filled with a portentous roar. The rain no longer fell in sheets, but in solid masses. The creek, black except where it was lashed into foam, rose like a mighty river and tore down the cañon, hoarsely howling on its way. The sides of the narrow pass seemed to melt into dropping streams of water. The trail disappeared, and along the foaming tide rushed wagons, horses, oxen, men, and the floating wrecks of trains which had been farther up the cañon.

The angry flood, checked by the sharp angle of rock around which the boys had just passed, roared in a solid wall over that part of the trail, then spread out and

curled hissing, up to the little eminence on which the party, with scared faces, stood as if spell-bound. The loose cattle of the Rose drove were in the rear. They were swept off like insects. Then the flood, as if holding on by its claws at the rocky angle behind, backed up and backed up, until, with one mighty effort, it swept the wagon-bodies off their beds, overturned the cattle in their yokes, and then slunk off down the cañon, and slowly fell away.

Captain Rose, climbing a wrecked wagon, in the midst of the still falling rain, looked about anxiously, gave a great sob, and said:

"I'm a ruined man; but, thank God, we're all here!"

The angry current yet fled down the cañon, making the trail impassable. But the worst was over. They were all alive. Even Pete, to whom Arty had clung in the extremity of his terror, was safe and sound. All were drenched, and it was only by clinging to the half-floating wagons that they had been saved from drowning. But the yoke cattle were here. So was poor old Jim, and a few of Rose's loose cattle, as well as his horses.

"What was that?" asked Tom, his teeth chattering with fear and cold.

"A cloud-burst," said Mont, solemnly. "And it will be a wonderful thing if hundreds of people in this cañon are not drowned by it."

More than an hour passed before the creek had fallen enough to permit the emigrants to pass down the trail. But the cañon was free of the flood in an astonishingly short time. Before dark the little party, gathering up their wet goods and straightening out their teams, ventured down the trail.

The alders were crowded with fragments of wreck. Wagon-covers, clothing, and bits of small household stuff were hanging from rocks and brush. The trail was washed out by the flood, and along it were strewn the bodies of drowned animals. For the most part, however, the wrecks had been swept clean out of the cañon, and were now lying on the sandy plain beyond.

Nobody ever knew how many lives were lost in that memorable cloud-burst. They were many. The boy emigrants passed out and camped on the fast-drying plain at the mouth of the cañon, where they found Philo Dobbs, his wife, and Nance. They, with Messer, had laid by outside before the storm came up, having been one day's travel ahead of our boys.

Rose had lost sixty head of cattle, a few of those first missing having been picked up afterward.

"Where's yer yaller hoss?" asked Hi of Barney.

The sorrel horse was gone.

"Light come, light go," said Hi, sententiously.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE DESERT

It was early in September when the young emigrants reached the headwaters of the Humboldt. Here the road led by the side of the stream, which flowed through a narrow valley. Outside of this valley the country was a tumultuous mass of rocks, mountains, and sand. No tree nor shrub relieved the prospect anywhere. It was an utterly desolate and trackless desert. Close by the stream, whose bluish-white waters were shaded by willows, there was a plenty of grass, and the water was at least fit to drink. So the party journeyed on blithely, forgetful of the dangers behind, and careless of the privations before or behind them.

Occasionally the road left the river and crossed over a rough ridge of hills, for ten or twelve miles, and then, having made a straight line across a curve of the stream, struck it again farther down. But, after about two weeks of travel, with some days of rest, orders went out to cut grass for the long stretch of desert which was now to be traversed. Knives of all sorts were brought out and sharpened, and the emigrants spent

one afternoon in cutting and binding up the lush, coarse grass which grew plentifully in the meadows. Not far from this point the Humboldt spreads out in a boggy lake, overgrown with reeds and bulrushes, and is lost in the desert. About the edges of this strange swamp the whole surface of the earth is dry and parched. The spreading river seems discouraged by the barren waste before it, and it sinks away in the sands and is gone.

"This everlasting sage-brush!" murmured Arty, as the party left the verdure of the Humboldt meadows and struck once more into the arid plain, where the only vegetation was the yellow-brown sage-brush or the whity-yellow grease-weed. "This everlasting sage-brush! How sick I am of it."

"Oh, well, don't speak ill of the sage-brush, Arty," said Mont, pleasantly. "Besides, it is called artemisia, which is a much nicer name; and if it was not for the artemisia, otherwise sage-brush, I don't know what you would do for fuel."

"That's so, Mont," added Hi. "And though I don't know much about your arty-what-d'ye-call-it, I allow it's put here for some good end. See, that thar sage-stalk is nigh as thick as my leg, and good fire-wood it is. Howsoever it gets to grow in this sand gets me, I must say. Still I shall be glad when we are shut of it. Hit's a sure sign of desert wherever it grows."

It was an abominable country. The face of the earth was undulating, but gradually rising as the trail ran westward, and was covered with loose black, yellow, and red bowlders, and split masses of rock. The wagon-trail was almost knee-deep with dust, and was sprinkled with broken stones, over which the wagons jolted dismally. Beyond, as far as the eye could reach, and disappearing over the swales of the surface, stretched a long, long line of teams, over which a pillar of dust continually rose into the hot air. The sun poured down its fiercest beams, and the far-off hills to the north looked as if they were calcined by the terrible heat, and ashes seemed to cover their glowing sides.

After a long and weary tramp the boys reached Antelope Springs, a place whose name had such a pleasant sound to them that they had longed for it very much. It was a bitter disappointment. Hundreds of teams were already there before them, and the two feeble little springs which had gushed out from under a ledge of rocks in this dryness were trampled and choked with mud. The water which trickled down from these pools was not fit to drink; even the suffering cattle would not touch it. After waiting several hours and taking up a spoonful of water at a time, the boys secured enough to make some coffee—the first nourishment they had had since morning; and it was now nearly sundown.

Rabbit-hole Springs, twenty miles off, must be reached before any water for the cattle and horses could be found. It was a day's drive in the best of times. Now they must make it in one night.

The poor animals, hungry and thirsty, could hardly drag the wagons over the rough roads; and the boys, faint, foot-sore and sleepy, stumbled along in the dark, ready to fall down and sleep forever in the rocky way. As the night wore on the air grew cool, and they toiled up and down the steep ridges with some sense of relief.

During the night, while sweeping down a mountain-side, the party suddenly blundered into the midst of the encampment of a large company of emigrants. These people were evidently tired out with their march; not one of them was to be seen. Their cattle were scattered about in all directions, and their tents were silent as the grave. Into this tranquil settlement suddenly burst the train of the Roses, the young emigrants, and several others who had "bunched" together while crossing the desert. In a twinkling the loose animals rushed to the right and left among the tents and wagons, startled by the unexpected sight or searching for something to eat.

The confusion was instant and dire. Men rushed out of their tents or from under their wagons, half-dressed and panic-stricken. Their alarm changed to rage when they saw the cause of the midnight invasion;

and they tried in vain to stop the bewildered cattle, which charged on the tents, tore down the canvas, and hungrily grabbed at anything eatable and in reach. Old Jim snatched a huge bundle of grass in his teeth, and bore it off triumphantly, never heeding the stones and yells flung after him.

Men shouted, women screamed, children bawled, dogs barked, and cattle bellowed. The surprise was complete, and the stampede perfect. It took a long time to straighten out the trains, separate the cattle, and pacify the strangers, who returned to their dismantled tents in a very unhappy frame of mind.

"Shouldn't hev camped right on the trail if ye didn't want to git up and dust in the middle of the night," was Bush's remark as he collected his small equipage of cow and cart and went swinging down into the valley, with as much self-complacency as if he had commanded the whole train.

The night grew cooler, and when the caravan reached the long, sandy plain which now stretched out toward Rabbit-hole Springs, Arty wrapped his blanket about his shoulders and journeyed out into the mysterious star-lighted waste, accompanied only by his faithful Pete. The road was heavy with loose sand, but not difficult to walk in, and the boy soon passed out of all sight and hearing of the teams behind him. He was alone in a sea of sand, the dog keeping close behind at

his heels. The sky, spangled with stars, bent over him, and far off the dim horizon shaded away into the gloom of the distant hills. Arthur fancied himself a lost traveler, far from human habitation or human trace, and he pressed on against the rising breeze with a keen sense of the novel loneliness of his condition. The cries of the ox-drivers and the crush of wheels had died away in the distance, and only when Pete, terrified at the unearthly stillness, came up from behind, whined for a word of recognition and dropped back to his place, did the lad hear any sound that reminded him that he was in the land of the living.

Reaching a drift of sand, where the wind had curled up a wave in the shape of a furrow, Arty wrapped his blanket about him and lay down and gazed out on the lonely desert waste, with a strange sort of fascination. Pete whimpered at this unusual proceeding. He seemed anxious and disturbed by the strange influence of the night; and he crept under the boy's blanket and snuggled up close, as if for companionship.

Presently, while Arty was dreamily looking off into the gloom, and wondering why he was not sleepy, the dog growled uneasily.

"Oh, keep still, Pete! One would suppose you saw a ghost."

But the dog, thus reproved, was silent only for a moment. He growled again with more positiveness,

and Arty, straining his ear, caught no sound coming out of the mysterious shadows.

"What a fool I was to come out here alone," he muttered. "Keep still, Pete, can't you? But there are no Indians on this desert, I'm sure; nothing for 'em to eat. Wild animals, perhaps!"

And here Pete, who could endure it no longer, bounced out from under the blanket, where he had been growling and grumbling to himself, and barked loud, long, and without restraint.

The boy hushed him for a moment, when a faint cry of "Hallo! Arty!" came out of the darkness. It was Mont's voice, and Pete bounded off to meet him.

"Gracious! how you scared me, Mont!" said Arty, as his comrade came up. "What are you ahead for?"

"Well, you see, Hi is driving. Barney Crogan is asleep in the wagon, and Tom is riding with Nance's folks. So I got lonesome and came on ahead to find you. Nice night."

"Yes, but how strange it is! See those stars. That's Orion, you know. My mother showed me that constellation ever so many years ago; and, do you know, I was just thinking how queer it is that all those stars should shine over us here, away off in the desert, just as they used to at Sugar Grove; just as they used to shine in Vermont, I suppose—but I don't remember much about that."

The young man made no answer, but sat down by Arty's side, clasped his hands over his knees, and looked out into the shadowy plain. The boy was silent again, the dog curled up and slept at his feet, and Mont thought of the stars shining over his New England home, far away. He saw the gable windows of his mother's house gleaming in the moonlight, the bronzed elms that made dark shadows over the lanes of the suburban town where his old home was, and the silvery river that rushed under the bridge with wooden piers, which he had crossed so often. Around him stretched a trackless, uninhabitable waste. It was as silent as the tomb. Out of its depths came no sound; only the chill night wind whispered over the sand-dunes and among the pebbles lying in the dark hollows of this sea of sand.

Suddenly, as he mused, out in the vague mystery of the plain he heard the boom of a deep-toned bell—once, twice, thrice, four times sounding on the air.

"The bell! the bell!" he shouted and started to his feet. Pete barked in sympathy.

"Golly! what bell?" asked Arty.

"The nine o'clock bell at Cambridgeport! At least, I thought I heard it just then!" He added: "Good heavens! Am I mad?—or dreaming?" Then he laughed confusedly, and said: "Well, I must have been

in a waking dream. Don't mind it. Here comes the train."

And, as he spoke, the teams came, slowly grinding their way through the darkness of the night.

The waning moon had faded away in the early gray of the morning before the tired emigrants reached Rabbit-hole Springs. It was a queer place. A dry, smooth hill, rounded and baked, bore on its topmost curve a cluster of wells. These were dug by emigrants, and they reached a vein of water which kept these square holes always supplied. Rude steps were cut in the sides of the pits, and, cautiously creeping down them, the precious water was dipped up plentifully. No matter how many were filled, the supply never gave out.

Here the party drank and gave to their beasts. Then, filling all available vessels, they went on to the plain below, where, at four o'clock in the morning, they halted long enough to get ready a meagre breakfast. The air began to grow warm again as the wind fell, and Arty, stupefied with fatigue and sleeplessness, stumbled about his camp-stove in a daze. Everybody but himself had dropped in the dust to sleep. He was alone, although a thousand people were camped all about on the sandy plain.

There was no fuel but dry grease-weed, and his hands were in the dough.

MONT THOUGHT OF THE STARS SHINING OVER HIS NEW ENGLAND HOME, FAR AWAY

"Get up and get something to burn, you Crogan," he said crossly, kicking his sleeping brother's shins as he lay under the wagon.

"Yes, mother," drawled the young fellow in his dreams; "I'm coming—coming," and he was asleep again.

Half crying with vexation, Arty sat down on the wagon-tongue and shouted out, in the most general way: "If some of you fellows don't wake up and get some firing, you'll have no breakfast, so now!"

Nobody stirred; but Nance, gingerly picking her way over the pebbly ground, barefooted and dusty, came up and said:

"I'll help ye, Arty. Take yer hands out o' that dough and get yer fire-wood, and I'll finish yer bread. Salt? Bakin' powder? Now git."

"Nancy, you're the best girl I ever knew," said Arty.

"That's what she is," interposed Johnny, who was now sitting up in the sand. "Did you call, Arty?"

"Lie down again and nap it while you can," said Arty, his anger all gone. "You've a long tramp before you to-day, my little man."

Only two hours were allowed for breakfast, and then the weary march began again. One of Rose's men—a tall, gangling young fellow, known in the camp as "Shanghai"—threw up his contract and determined to

"get out and walk." He declared that he had been "put upon" long enough. He had not been provided with the cattle-whip which had been promised him. He had been compelled to drive loose cattle in the fearful dust of the day before, while some more favored person was allowed to drive the steers. To crown all, he had had but one spoonful of "dope" at breakfast that day. This was too much. He would go on alone.

Van Orman, a stolid, black-bearded man, one of Rose's teamsters, who had very profound views on the subject of earthquakes and volcanoes, and who never, under any circumstances, could get enough to eat, listened to poor Shanghai's tearful complaints, threw down his whip, and said:

"Hang it! Shanghai, I'll go with ye!"

And these two pilgrims, packing all their worldly effects in one small bundle, took their way over the arid hills toward the Golden Land.

At noon the long caravan, passing over a succession of rocky and dusty ridges, reached the last one, from which they gazed off into the great plain. It was like a vast sea. Far to the westward, a chain of sharp, needle-like peaks towered up to the sky. Northward, a range of hills, flaming in red and blue, looked as if they were masses of hot iron. South, the undulating level melted into the brassy sky. Across the dusky

waste a long line of wagons travelled, far below the point on which the boy emigrants paused before they began their descent.

Looking toward the red-hot hills, and over the plain tremulous with heated air, Arthur saw, to his intense surprise, a crooked, shining line of blue. It glided out and in among clumps of willows, and rippled in the sunshine. It was a creek, a considerable stream, and, even from this distance, he could almost hear the gurgle of the blessed water.

"Water! water!" he cried, almost with tears.

Everybody gazed. Even the sullen cattle sniffed it with their noses, and poor Tige set up a disconsolate bellow as he looked.

"Only a mirage, Arty," said Mont, with a tinge of despondency. "See it pass?"

And, as he spoke, the trees faded away, the blue waters sunk into the earth, and only the parched rocks and hills remained. Then, moving down, the delusion seemed to envelop the caravans below. The wagons grew and grew until they appeared to be fifteen or twenty feet high. Then these spectral figures broke in two, and on each wagon was the shape of another, bottom up and its wheels in the air. Then on this ghostly figure was another wagon, its wheels resting on the wheels of that below. This weird procession lasted a moment, shuddered, and melted away like a

dream. Only the commonplace caravan plodded its weary way through the powdery dust.

At sunset, after a second distressing day's drive, the travelers reached the range of peaks which, like an island, divided the desert into two parts. Here was water, so hot that an egg might have been boiled in it. Tige, who was on the sick list, put his black muzzle into it, and, astonished at the phenomenon, set off on a brisk run with his tail in the air.

"Poor old chap! He has not got all his wits about him, now that he is sick," said Mont, compassionately.

Even when the water was cooled in pails, the cattle distrusted it, and hesitated to taste it. The boys stewed beans, baked biscuit, and made coffee, using a portion of the scanty stock of fuel brought a long way for this very purpose; for here not even grease-weed nor the tiniest blade of grass ever grew. The surface of the ground was utterly bare.

A little withered grass, brought from the Humboldt, remained in the wagons, and was distributed among the cattle. Tige refused to eat it, and as the boys sat in the door of their tent, eating their desert fare, the docile animal came up, and, resting his nose on Arty's shoulder, looked, winking, into his tin plate of stewed beans.

"Have some, Tige?" said Arty. "Poor old Tige, he's off his grub."

And the steer, cautiously sniffing at the plate, put out his tongue, tasted with apparent satisfaction, and licked up the whole.

"Now, *I* call that extravagance!" said Tom, ladling out another plateful of beans.

"And *I* call it genewine humanity. That's what it is, Mister Smarty," rejoined Hi. "Whatever else we haven't got, I allow we've beans enough to get us through with."

At sundown onward went the emigrants, as if pursued by some hidden enemy. Out into the desert swept the great train of wagons, cattle, men, and women—out into the desert, with the tall and motionless peaks of purple towering above them into the evening sky, now flushed and rosy. How they tramped on and on, like a caravan of life, out into an unknown world, rich and poor, young and old together! Leaving behind them their homes, and leaving by the way their dead, they swept past the islanded mountains, and so pressed on to the West.

When the night came on, and the yellow moon flooded the vast level plain with liquid light, the sight was very strange. The air was cool, the ground white with a firm sand which scarcely yielded to the easily running wheels. In the weird lustre that covered the plain, a lame steer, turned out to die, and standing away off from the trail, loomed up like a giraffe. Look-

ing back, the long train seemed to rise up and melt away into the air; and forward, the blue-black mountains that bounded the plain were flecked with silver where the moonlight fell on quartz ledges and patches of belated snow.

Occasionally a cry from the rear told that another "critter" had fallen, and some one must be detailed to bring it along, if possible. But the train rolled on until the camp-fires of Granite Creek shone on the desert. At two o'clock in the morning, inexpressibly weary, the emigrants reached a slightly raised plateau at the foot of another range of mountains. Without waiting to examine the ground, which was a rough plain bordering on a creek, the boys put up their tent, unyoked the cattle, which were too tired to stray, dropped into their blankets, and slept until long after the next day's sunrise.

Many of the cattle brought here, after the drive across the Great Plains, were left to die. The boys rested one day, and, when another night came on, they yoked their unwilling oxen, and were off again. It was sunset when they passed southward around the spur of mountains which lay across their path. And it was four o'clock on the following morning when they paused and built another camp-fire in the midst of the last stretch of desert, on the western side of the range. Here was a level, floor-like plain, and the

tents pitched with the flaps rolled up gave the scene an Oriental air. No Arabian coffee in the desert was ever more delicious than that which our weary young pilgrims drank. And no delicacies of a luxurious city could have been more welcome to these wandering sons than the well-browned biscuits which Arty's deft hands drew from their camp-oven.

The last day's travel was the hardest of all. Cattle dropped by the wayside. Strong men fainted with fatigue, or grew delirious with sleeplessness. In some of the companies there was real want, and strange rumors of a plot to rob the better-provided ones floated back and forth among the trains, now moving once more in single file over the bleak and barren hills. No vegetation met the eye, no insect or bird cried in the joyless air; a fierce sun poured down its rays upon the struggling line. Here and there, a grave, newly made and rudely marked, showed where some poor pilgrim had fallen by the way. The very sky seemed to add to the utter desolation of the land.

But, at sunset, the young emigrants, after fording a salt creek, climbed the rocky ridge which separated the desert from the fertile region known as the Smoke Creek country. The train toiled on and passed over the divide. Arthur and Mont paused and looked back. The setting sun bathed the plain below them in golden radiance. A flood of yellow sunshine gushed over the

arid waste, and broke in masses among the violet shadows of the mountain range beyond. Eastward, the rocky pinnacles, glorified with purple, gold, and crimson, pierced a sky rosy and flecked with yellow. It was like a glimpse of fairy-land.

Arty held his breath as he gazed, and forgot his fatigue for a moment.

"It is as beautiful as a dream," said the boy.

"And as cruel as death," added Mont.

"I shall never forget it, Mont."

"Nor I."

CHAPTER XVII

THE GOLDEN LAND

"Poor old Tige! We may as well take him out of the yoke."

The plucky little ox would have dragged on with his mate Molly until he dropped. But he was too sick to travel. The boys were now near Honey Lake Valley, where feed was good and water plenty. They had crossed the last considerable ridge, or divide, before reaching the Sierra; a few days more would bring them to their journey's end.

The faithful beast had pulled steadily through the awful desert and over the volcanic region which lay between that region and the Honey Lake country. As Johnny and Arthur unfastened the yoke to let the invalid Tige go free, the creature looked around in wonder, as if to ask the reason of this unwonted proceeding.

"Tige, my boy," said Arthur, "I am afraid you won't wear the yoke again."

"Is he so bad as that, Arty?" asked Johnny, sympathetically, and almost with tears.

"Well, you see, Johnny," interposed Barnard,

"there is very little chance for a critter that's alkalied ever to get well. That dose of melted fat we gave him yesterday didn't do him one bit of good. Hi says that he allows that his milt is all eaten through with alkali. Whatever the milt may be I don't know; do you, Mont?"

"Diaphragm, I guess," said Mont.

"Dyer what?" asked Tom. "Dyer—well, that's a good one. I tell you it's the milt. Don't you know what the milt is?"

"Give it up," said Barney, shortly. "Hurrah, there's the Sierra!"

And as he spoke, their team, drawn now by one yoke, rounded the ragged summit of the ridge, and they beheld the Sierra Nevada.

Below was a winding valley, dotted with isolated lofty pines, and bright with green grass. A blue stream rambled about the vale and emptied into a muddy-looking lake at the south. This was Honey Lake, and the stream was Susan's River. Beyond, westward, was a vast wall, bristling with trees and crowned with white peaks. It was the Snowy Range of mountains. Beyond it was the promised land.

The boys gazed with delight on the emerald valley and the sparkling river; but chiefly were they fascinated by the majestic mountains beyond these. They were not near enough to see the smaller features of the

range. But their eyes at last beheld the boundary that shut them out of the Land of Gold. The pale green of the lower hills faded into a purple-blue, which marked where the heavy growth of pines began. Above this, and broken with many a densely shadowed gulch and ravine, rose the higher Sierra, bald and rocky in places, and shading off into a tender blue where the tallest peaks, laced with snow, were sharply cut against the sky.

Before the young emigrants were water, rest, and pasturage. But beyond were the mysterious fastnesses in which men, while they gazed, were unlocking the golden secrets of the earth. Up there, in those vague blue shadows, where the mountain-torrents have their birth, miners were rending the soil, breaking the rocks, and searching for hidden treasure. The boys pressed on.

But two days passed before the emigrants, with their single yoke of cattle, and often delayed by swamps and by getting on false trails, reached the base of the Sierra. It was now late in September, and the nights were cool. While on the high ridges west of the Great Desert, they had had a touch of cold weather. Ice had formed outside of the tent on more than one night; and, inside, the boys had shivered under their blankets and buffalo skins, though the days were hot. But here was fuel in plenty.

Here, too, at the foot of the mountains, they found a ranch, or farm, the tiller of which had steadily refused to be charmed away by tales of gold discoveries on the other side of the wall of mountains.

He leaned on his rail fence and eyed the vast procession of emigrants with a cynical air. The boys almost envied him the possession of such a trim little farm; for, though it was really rude and straggling, it looked like a home, a haven of rest, after their long march in the desert and wilderness. They felt, for the first time, that they were ragged, uncouth, toil-stained, and vagabondish in appearance. Here was a man wearing a white shirt, or it was once white; and a woman stood in the doorway, with knitting-work in her hands. It was a domestic picture, and in sharp contrast to emigrant life on the plains.

"Oh, you're bound to the gold-diggin's, you be?" he said, with an unpleasant leer. "Wal, now, I've heerd that men were makin' wages over there—day wages just—and flour at twenty dollars a hundred. But boys—wal, now, this gets me! Boys? No wages yonder for boys, you jest bet your life!"

"Don't you worry yourself, old man," retorted Hi, who always did the rude badinage of the party. "We'll come back next week and buy out your shebang, boys or no boys, wages or no wages."

"Got any vegetables to sell?" asked Barney, civilly.

"Vegetables! Stranger, look a-there!" said the ranchero, pointing to a patch of ground well dug over. "D'ye see that there patch? Wal, that there patch was full of corn and taters. Corn don't do well here; too cold and short seasons. But this year them crazy critters that hev been pilin' over the mountains hev carried off every stalk and blade and ear. What they didn't beg, they stole; and what wasn't growed was carried off half-growed."

"Stole your crop?"

"That's about the size of it. I'm from Michi*gan*, I am, and was brought up regular; but I jest laid out in that corn-field nights, with a double-barrel shot-gun, untel there wa'n't no corn for me to hide in. Stole? Why, them pesky gold-hunters would hev carried the ground away from under my feet, if they'd a-wanted it. Smart fellers, they be!"

"Why don't you go on and try your luck in the mines?" asked Barnard, who, with Mont and Arty, had lingered behind, hoping that they might buy a few fresh vegetables.

"So far as I've heerd tell, there's no luck there. Here and there a chunk, but nothin' stiddy. The mines hev gi'n out; they've been givin' out ever since they was struck, and now they've gi'n out clean."

"And are you going to stay here and farm it?" asked Barney.

"Young feller"—and here the rough-faced ranchero put on a most sagacious air—"ranchin' here is better than gold-diggin' over yender. Here I stay. That there's my wife, Susan; that's Susan's River yender, and this here's Susanville, now hear me."

"And you find farming profitable, although the emigrants steal your crop?"

"Wal, young feller," he said to Mont, "you're a sort of civil-spoken chap; seein' it's you, I'll sell you a few taters for a dollar a pound."

The boys bought two pounds of potatoes and went on, alarmed at their first great extravagance.

"Never mind," said Rose, when they told him of their purchase. "You'll have no more chance to buy potatoes after this. Reckon you might as well get yer fust and last taste of 'em now."

Camping at night in the forests of the Sierra was like being in paradise. No more sand, no more sage-brush, no more brackish or hot water in the rivulets. Gigantic pines stretched far up into the star-lighted sky. Ice-cold streams danced over the mountain-side. The cattle lay down to rest in nooks carpeted with lush grass. The boys built a tremendous fire in the midst of their camp, piling on the abundant fuel in very wantonness, as they remembered how lately they were obliged to economize handfuls of dry grass and weeds in their little camp-stove.

This was luxury and comfort unspeakable; and as they basked in the cheerful light and heat, Hi said:

"I allow I'd just as soon stay here forever. The gold mines are a fool to this place."

Barney poked the glowing fire, which was kindled against a mighty half-dead pine, and said:

"Who votes this is a good place to stay in?"

There was a chorus of laughing "I's" about the fire as the boys lounged in every comfortable attitude possible. At that, there was a horrible roar from the pine-tree by the fire, and from the midst of the curling flames suddenly appeared a huge creature, which bounded through the blaze, scattered the brands, broke up the circle of loungers, who fled in all directions, knocked over little Johnny, and disappeared down the side of the mountain, with a savage growl.

The boys stared at each other in blank amazement, and with some terror.

"An elephant!"

"A tiger!"

"A catamount!"

"A grizzly bear!"

"It *was* a bear! I felt his fur as he scrabbled over me!" said Johnny with a scared face and his teeth chattering.

Just then there was a shot down the mountain in the

direction in which the monster had gone crashing through the under-brush. Then another, and another shot sounded. Everybody ran. They came up with two or three men from a neighboring camp, running in the same direction. Reaching a little hollow in the wood, they found two emigrants examining a confused dark heap on the ground.

"What is it?" cried the new-comers.

"A b'ar," said one the men, taking out his knife and making ready to skin the animal. "Heerd him crashin' through the brush and let him have it."

"A grizzly?" asked Tom.

"No, a cinnamon, I allow," said the other man, striking a light for his pipe, before he began to help his comrade.

Johnny, who had not quite recovered from his fright, looked at the bronzed face of the emigrant, illuminated as it was for a moment by the flaming match, and exclaimed:

"Bill Bunce!"

"Hello! my little kid," said the fellow unconcernedly. "Whar've yer bin this long back?"

Johnny was too much astonished to reply, and Mont, with some severity of manner, said:

"This is the boy you abandoned on the Mississippi River, is it not, Bunce?"

"Well, now, stranger, I allow you are too many for

me. My understandin' was that he throwed off on me. Say, pard," he continued, addressing his mate, "just yank him over on his back. There now, this skin's wuth savin'. He's fat, he is; must weigh nigh onto three hundred."

The boys went back to their camp-fire very discontentedly. After all, there was nothing to be done. They might have accused Bunce of attempting to steal Old Jim.

"Well, we've got our baked potatoes, anyhow," grumbled Barney, as he raked two dollars' worth of that useful vegetable out of the ashes.

Later, while they were debating as to what they might demand of Bill Bunce, when they should see him again, the comrade of that mysterious person appeared by the camp-fire with a huge bear-steak.

"With Mr. Bunce's compliments," he said, with a grin. "It was your bear-like, as it mought be; came outen your back-log," and the stranger disappeared.

"Cheeky," said Barney.

"Now, a b'ar-steak is not to be sneezed at. We'll have a jaw with that Bunce feller to-morrow," said Hi, surveying the welcome fresh meat with great gratification.

But next day when the boys awoke at sunrise, and surveyed the neighboring camping-grounds, no trace of Bill Bunce's party was to be found. They had "lit

out" early in the dawning, a good-natured emigrant informed them.

On the second day after this adventure, the party reached a narrow ridge, the summit of the gap in the Sierra over which they were passing. They had toiled up a steep incline, winding among rocks and forests. Before them was a descent too steep for any team to be driven down it. Yet the road pitched down this tremendous incline, and they saw the tracks of wagons that had just gone on ahead.

"See here," said Mont, who had been spying about. "Here are marks on the trees, as if ropes had been slipped around them. They have let the wagons down this inclined plane by ropes."

"But where are the ropes for us? And how do they get the cattle down? Slide them?" asked Barney.

"I don't know where our ropes are to be got," replied Morse. "But you can see the tracks of the cattle in the under-brush. They have been driven down that way."

Here was a dilemma. They could hardly urge the cattle up the steep slope on the eastern side. There was not room enough for two teams to stand on top, and westward the ridge dropped away sharply, like the smooth roof of a house, for several hundred feet.

"Oh, here comes the Knight of the Rueful Countenance!" said Mont. "He has a coil of rope." And the

sad-faced Messer came urging his cattle up the hill. The situation was explained to him.

"Yes, I allow I've heerd tell of this yere place," he said, "and powerful bad sleddin' hit is. Now, how d'yer allow to get down?"

Barnard explained to him how other people must have gone down. The rope was produced from Messer's wagon, one end made fast to the hinder axle of a wagon. Then a turn was taken about a tree, and some of the party carefully steadied the vehicle down the hill, while the others held the rope taut, and let it slip around the tree-trunk, as the wagon slid slowly down. The oxen and loose cattle were driven over by a round-about way through the brush. Poor old Tige at once lay down on reaching the valley below, and Arthur almost wept as the sick creature staggered to his feet and struggled on after the train, when they had crossed the divide and yoked up on the western side of the range.

Passing through "Devil's Corral," a curious, huge bowl of rocks, set up like a gigantic wall about a grassy hollow, the party camped on the margin of a magnificent meadow. Here was a flat valley, filled with springs and rank with grass and herbage. A pure stream circled about its edge, and, like a wall, a growth of tall pines and firs shut it in all about. The forest which sloped down to this enchanted spot was aromatic

with gums and resin, and multitudes of strange birds filled the air.

In this lavish plenty, the boys camped for two days, in order that the tired cattle might be rested. It seemed as if the abundant grass and sparkling water might restore Tige's health, if anything could. Arty carefully tended the poor beast. But he was filled with forebodings, and, rising early in the morning after their first night in the valley, went out to look after his favorite. Johnny was up before him, and came toward Arty, dashing something from his eyes with his brown fist.

"Well?" said Arthur, with a little quiver in his voice.

"He's all swelled up," sobbed the boy.

Arthur ran down into the meadow. The little black steer was lying cold and stiff. Tige's journey was done.

There was lamentation in the camp, and the sallow Missourian, who had camped with Captain Rose and the boys, said, with the deepest melancholy:

"Such luck! Wish I hadn't a-come!"

From this point the emigrants dropped out to the north and south, and some pressed on to the westward, striking for the rich mines said to exist on the edge of the Sacramento Valley.

The news was good. More than that, it was intoxicating. Men raced about as if they had a fever in

their bones. The wildest stories of gold finds floated among the camps, faces grew sharp with anxiety and covetousness, and mysterious murmurs of robberies and darker crimes began to fill the air. The boys were on the edge of the gold-diggings. The wildness and lawlessness came up from the whirl beneath like faint echoes into these peaceful old forest solitudes

On the last day of September, the boy emigrants mounted Chaparral Hill. Mont, Arty, and Barnard, climbing a peak near by, looked off on a golden valley, rolling far to the west, shining with streams and checkered with patches of timber. Westward, a misty mountain wall of blue melted into the pale sky. Nearer, a range of purple peaks rose, like a floating island in the midst of a yellow sea. This was the valley of the Sacramento, with the Coast Range in the distance and the Sutter Buttes in the midst. Behind all, but unseen, rolled the Pacific.

The wagons crept over Chaparral Hill, halted by a group of canvas and log houses. A party of uncouth-looking men were loitering about the camp. Beyond, by a creek, others were shovelling soil into a long wooden trough in which water was running. Others were wading, waist-deep, in the stream.

There was an odor of fried bacon in the air, and the sinking sun shone redly over the camp-fires, where the men were cooking their supper.

"How's the diggings?" asked Captain Rose of a tall fellow, who was lying at full length on the ground, and teasing a captive magpie.

"Slim," was the reply.

"Well, I reckon we'll stop here for the present. Claims all taken up?"

"Thar's room enough"; and the miner laughed as he went on with his play with the bird.

The boys, somewhat dejected, drove down by "the branch," unyoked their cattle, and set up their tent.

This was the Golden Land.

CHAPTER XVIII

CROWBAIT GULCH

THERE was not much time for the young miners to look about them. Their provisions were nearly exhausted, cold weather was coming on, and what mining was to be done must quickly be undertaken. They were on one of the innumerable branches of the Rio de las Plumas, or, as the new-comers called it, "for short," Feather River. This branch was only a shallow creek now, rippling over a bed of gravel. Later, it would be swollen with the fall rains, and choked with floating ice. Their stock of ready cash, which had seemed considerable when they left home, was now so small that it would hardly buy a hundred pounds of flour. Their bacon was quite gone, and the only staple article of food left them was a goodly bag of beans. Farmer Stevens had insisted on their taking a plenty of beans. The boys had remonstrated, and Barney had laughingly said that the miners would accuse them of being bean merchants. But he and Arty now saw the wisdom of their father's advice. Beans were in great demand. Sixteen dollars for two quarts of beans

had been paid at the Chaparral Hill diggings; and the boys had nearly a bushel.

By some miscalculation, as they thought, they had brought more coffee than they needed. Often and often, the weather was so bad that they could not roast and grind the green coffee which was part of their outfit; they had used the tea, because that could be easily steeped, as long as they could heat a pot of water. But the coffee had resisted all their efforts to get rid of it. When their wagon was upset in the hard places on the Plains and over the mountains, the coffee was always safe. The passing emigrants, who asked them if they had any stores to sell or exchange, never wanted coffee. It was too much trouble to prepare it. The boys had thirty pounds of coffee and almost a bushel of beans. This represented a small fortune, though they had no money.

They had one ox, one cow, and one horse. But poor old Jim was so thin and feeble that he was at once named by the friendly miners "Crowbait." Their wagon was in fair condition. The tent was as good as new. They had pans, picks, and shovels for gold-mining; and with stout hearts, strong hands, and high hopes, what was not possible to them? The gold was hidden all about them in the ravines, gulches, and river beds. They had come to dig it out, and they were impatient to begin.

Scattered up and down the stream were small encampments of diggers. A few had tents; many slept in the open air, wrapped in their blankets, though the nights were chill. Some of the more home-loving miners had built booths of boughs and logs, and had fashioned rude tables, benches, and a few bunks from the costly lumber which found its way up here from Greasertown, a small camp down the river, where some industrious Mexicans had established a saw-pit. These little settlements were at once given names of some sort, in order to distinguish them from each other in the rude gossip of the country. One group of tents, cabins and booths, which boasted of a population of twenty-five men, was known as "Forty Thieves," though there were only twenty-five people in the camp, and not one was a thief. Another was called "Fatty Gulch," because one of the members of the party in the camp happened to be an excessively lean fellow; and another was dubbed "Swellhead Diggings," on account of the personal character of several miners located there. Farther down stream were "Slap-Jack Bar," "Bogus Thunder," and "One Eye," names which might have meant something yesterday and which stuck there long after men had forgotten why they were ever given.

"I allow I'll light out of this," said Captain Rose, when they had been two days in camp. They had

settled up accounts all around, and were now ready to dissolve partnership.

"Well, if you go, we allow to stay, and if you stay, we allow to go," said Hiram, very frankly. "Thar ain't room for all of us."

"You can stay then, boys," said Rose. "There's nothin' doin' here. Nobody's makin' more than one or two ounces a day, and I want more than that."

"More than that!" cried Arty, opening his eyes with amazement. "Why! one ounce is sixteen dollars. Sixteen to thirty dollars a day!"

"That may suit you, young fellers," said Rose, discontentedly. "I've heerd tell on chaps down on the American River takin' out a thousand dollars at a lick. That's about my size. I'm bound to go out to the American. Be you fellers goin' to hang together?"

"Really, we had not thought of that," said Mont, with a smile. "We have not divided up our little property. I suppose we shall stick together for the present."

"I thought ye were limited pardners," rejoined Rose. "And if ye are, I'd like to have Arty along with me. Arty's a chirpy boy, and I'll give him a good show if he'd like to go along."

Arthur had heard a great deal about the fabulous riches dug up along the banks of the American, and he was fired with ambition to make money suddenly.

Here was a chance for him to go. He looked at Barney and Johnny. He caught Mont's eye watching him with an expression of anxiety, and, breathing a little quicker than usual, he said: "Thank you, Captain Rose, I'll stay with the rest of the boys."

"Hope you'll never be sorry for it. There's lots of gold down there. None here to speak of," and Captain Rose went away disappointed, for he liked the lad.

"How about this pardnership, anyhow?" said Hiram when Rose, a few days later, had left them to themselves.

"My idea about it is that we go right on together," said Barney. "Arty and I must hang together, of course. And I don't see how we can give up Johnny. He's bound to stay with Arty, there, so that's three of us to begin with. How about you and Tom, Hi?"

Hi "allowed" that he could not go off by himself. Tom was willing to do whatever Hi said, but he preferred to stay with the Stevens boys.

"I was the last one of the firm at Council Bluffs, you know," said Mont, "and I agreed that it should be a limited partnership, lasting only until we reached the diggings; and here we are."

"And you want to bust up the pardnership?" demanded Hi.

"Oh no, I'm in favor of continuing the old firm as long as we can live and work together harmoniously."

"That's just my gait," said Hi, enthusiastically. "Shake!" and he extended his rough hand in token of concluding the bargain. Mont took his hand, and, with a laugh, put his arm on Arty's shoulder, and said: "This is the little chap that keeps us together. So long as he has not set the example of running off on a wild goose chase, we can do no less than stay here and work it out."

"I'd have liked to have seen him going off with John Rose," grumbled Barney.

"It's a share and share alike, isn't it?" asked Hi. Just then his eye lighted on Johnny, who was busily cooking over the plentiful camp-fire. Hi's countenance fell, and he asked, with some constraint: "How about the little kid yonder?"

"Don't call him a kid," said Arthur, indignantly. "That's slang. Besides, Johnny's quite a big boy now."

"Yes," laughed Hi. "He's four months older than when we took him in at Council Bluffs. He can't do no work. You can, because you're two or three years older than he is, and are right smart at things."

"Johnny can do as much as I can, come now; and I'm willing to share with him. Tom, he, and I will have to do the drudgery anyhow."

"No more drudgery for me," put in Tom, with a frown.

"See here," said Mont, "there are three of us grown fellows and three boys. Arty and Barney belong together, and Tom, of course, joins his brother Hi. Let Johnny's share be with mine; that will make three equal partners in the camp. For my part, I am willing to give Johnny one-third of all I make. How's that, youngster?" he said to Johnny, who had left his bean-stew to listen to this interesting discussion.

"Oh, that's too much, Mont," said the lad, gratefully. "I am willing to work for my board."

"And clothes," added Tom, who was astonished at Mont's liberal proposition.

"Yes, and clothes," said Johnny, who had by this time found his Council Bluffs outfit necessary to cover his growing limbs.

"We shall all become covetous, by and by," said Mont, seriously. "I want to make a bargain now, that we shall all keep. Barney, you and Hi ought to be willing to divide with your brothers as I shall divide with little Johnny here. I suppose you are. Then we shall have only three shares, though each of us will have to divide with one of the boys; that is, provided we have anything to divide. For, after all," he added with a sober smile, "we are counting our chickens before they are hatched."

"The fact is," said Barney, "Arty and I are equal partners with each other. We settled that before we

left home. But I am agreed that there shall be three equal shares in the new concern—yours, Hi's, and mine. Never mind what we do with each share of any division we may make. How's that, Hi?"

"It's a whack," said Hi, heartily. So the partnership was reorganized and the partners were ready for work.

They had "panned out" enough gold from a dry gulch near by to assure them that they could make fair wages there for a time. Most of the mining in that region was done by digging up the gold-bearing earth and carrying it to the river-bank, where it was washed out with pans, cradles, or sluice-boxes, and the gold picked out. The commonest way was to carry, or "pack," the earth in sacks on men's backs, and then "pan" it out by the river. It was wearisome work. The pan was partly filled with dirt, then filled to the brim with water, and twirled around and around, first one way, then another, in the hands of the operator. The fine earth rose to the top, and was carried over the edge of the pan with a peculiar turn of the wrist. Water was added, and was whirled off again, carrying the refuse earth with it, until nothing was left in the bottom of the pan but coarse sand and gold. Sometimes—very often, indeed—after all the washing and watching, there was nothing found in the bottom but coarse black sand. But a miner who had a shovel

and a pan had all his necessary mining tools. With these on his back, sometimes carrying a pick, he traversed the country, searching for good diggings. If he found a poor prospect, he journeyed on and on looking for gold.

On the very first day after the boys had camped on Chaparral Creek they had "prospected" for gold. The precious stuff, in lumps, nuggets, dust, and coarse grains, was already familiar to their sight. They had sold a quart pot full of coffee for an ounce of golden ore. But they had never dug any out of the ground.

It was an exciting time. In a gulch which led down from the mountains and opened out to the creek was a flat place, overgrown with brambles and small shrubs of chaparral—a thorny bush—and cut up with the action of winter torrents. This had once been the bed of a stream, but only a slender thread of water crept down under the rocks which had formed the bottom of the old creek. The top soil was red and dry. Beneath it grew darker, browner, and more gravelly. This they shovelled into pans, and lugged to the edge of the creek below. Mont and Hi each took a pan and began to wash. Hi threw the water over his legs instead of from him, amidst the laughter of the boys, who anxiously looked on. Mont twirled his panful of mud, sand, and water quite dexterously, flirting off the superfluous stuff with a professional skill that de-

lighted Arty, who secretly hoped that Mont would be the first to find the gold. Hi wabbled his pan about clumsily, and soon covered his legs with mud and water. The turbid currents rippled over the edge of Mont's pan as it deftly revolved in his hands. Arty thought he saw the shimmer of the gold in the cloudy mass.

"Hear it! Hear it!" shouted Hi. "Hear it scratchin' on the bottom of the pan!"

Sure enough there was a rattle of something in the pan different from the steady grinding of the coarse sand. Just then, Hi, who was highly excited, twirled his pan out of his hands, and it fell, amidst a chorus of "Ohs" from the boys, bottom up, with its contents spilled all about. Hi impatiently snatched up his pan, and there, in a confused heap of sand and gravel, was a lump of bright, hard and shining gold! With a great hurrah, Hi seized it, held it in the air, cut a clumsy caper, and cried:

"The fust gold for the Fender family!"

It was a smooth, water-worn lump, of a dark yellow color, about as big as a robin's egg, and shaped very much like a pear that has been squeezed nearly flat.

Before the boys could sufficiently express their joy over this first gold of their own finding, Mont, who had only looked up with shining eyes as he kept on with his work, whirled off the watery contents of his pan and showed the heavier mass at the bottom. There was

about a quarter of an inch of black sand, and, shining on the surface, were four or five particles of gold. One was almost as big as a pea. The others were a little larger than pinheads, and one was a crumb so small that it would have been lost if the black sand had not shown it so plainly.

"Sho! that ain't nothin'," said Tom, contemptuously.

"Nothin'!" exclaimed Hi, with equal contempt. "Mont's got the color there, and more too. That's over three dollars; and I allow one dollar a pan is a mighty big thing. Them fellers up to Forty Thieves said that twenty-five cents to a pan was good diggin's."

A tall miner from One Eye, who was on his way up the creek, paused as he went by, looked on curiously at the boys, and with much excitement examined the half-washed heaps of earth on the ground.

"Right smart sort of a scad you've thar, stranger," he said, looking at Hi's find. "Must be more whar that come from."

"Yes," said Mont, "we have just been prospecting up the ravine. Shouldn't you think it worth while to follow it up?"

"Wal, I reckon yes. Chispas like that yere don't grow into every mud-hole. Thar's quartz rock where that yere come from. But that's a long ways from yere." And the tall stranger took his way on up the

stream, quite unconcerned at the sight of the yellow metal which had so excited our boys.

This was before Rose had left them. Rose, for his part, was not in favor of creek-diggings. He had heard of "crevicing" where the miners dug out the precious stuff from crevices in the rocks, after tearing way the earth; and nothing but "crevicing" would suit him now. Accepting the advice of some friendly neighbors at Forty Thieves, the boys formally made claim to the dry gulch, which they called "Hi's Gulch" from that day. They were mortified, some weeks later, to find that the miners of the neighborhood had christened this "Crowbait Gulch," on account of some fancied connection which Old Jim had with their good fortune. Their discomfiture was further increased when they discovered that the name was extended over their camp and party, so that they were called "The Crowbaits," just as if they had been a tribe of Indians with that singular title.

No disrespect was meant to them, however, and they thought they could endure being known as "The Crowbaits" so long as their nearest neighbors were content to be called "Forty Thieves."

Now, at last, they had money enough to buy flour and meat, a claim that was as good as a mine, and a tent over their heads. Already gleams of gold shone in their hands, and rosy visions of wealth began to

rise. There was a tolerably sure prospect for the future. Their trials were over, they thought. Their riches were almost on the surface of the ground.

"Do you know what this means, Arty?" said Barnard one day, showing him a crumb of gold.

"Victuals and drink, board and clothes," said the matter-of-fact youth.

Barney stooped and whispered in his ear one word—"Home."

CHAPTER XIX

GOLD

In a few weeks the young gold-seekers accumulated quite a stock of the precious ore. They could hardly believe their eyes when they weighed it over and over again, figured up the value of it, estimated it, and speculated on the chances of there being more like it in their gulch. It was a marvellous thing that they should actually dig this stuff out of the ground.

But there it was. It cost them many a weary day, and many a back-ache. They had stuck to their gold-pans; and two of the elder members of the party washed out the earth, which the others dug up in the gulch, and carried in sacks to the brink of the creek, where water was plenty. They had tried to make use of the little stream in the bottom of the gulch, but it was too slight to afford water enough; and they were continually digging under it, in hopes of finding rich lumps, or "chispas." The younger boys, in their intervals of packing the gold-bearing earth to the washing party by the creek, often washed out a panful of earth, furtively and eagerly, hoping to find a rich

return for their own labor. The gold, however, was for the most part in small bits,—like a very coarse gunpowder,—with occasional flakes as fine as meal. No such lump as that found by Hi at the beginning of their prospecting could be discovered in the gulch.

The diggings extended, so far as they could judge, quite across the flat mouth of the gulch or ravine, which was four or five hundred feet across, and outward to a sharp ledge, which ran diagonally across it, and thence sloped off to the edge of the creek. This ravine narrowed rapidly, and ran up into the woody ridge, about two thousand feet from its mouth. So the gold-bearing claim of the young emigrants was a V-shaped patch of earth about four or five hundred feet wide, and tapering off to a point about one thousand feet from the mouth, and thence gradually ascending into the slope of the ridge. Mont and Barney made a very systematic "prospecting" of the claim before the boys decided to stay. They sank deep holes at intervals along the V which has just been described, digging sometimes to a depth of six or eight feet before they reached the bottom layer of coarse black sand, gravel, and rock. The top surface was a rich soil, filled with vegetable mold and roots; next below was a clayey loam, and then the gold-bearing sand, gravel, and pebbles. Below all was an uneven layer of solid rock, which seemed like the bottom of a basin. This

was the bed-rock, and it rose gradually on either side of the ravine until its nearly perpendicular sides were lost in the abrupt slopes which formed the walls of the gulch. Under this rock, which could be broken through in places, no gold was ever found. The bed-rock, then, was like a dish; it rested on a layer of sterile, yellow gravel and clay. Into its platter-like surface the rain and floods of ages had washed down the soil, gravel, and water-worn gold which had once been scattered among the hills. Perhaps this gulch had been the outlet of an ancient river. Here the wash of the mountains had been carried down by freshets. The sand and gravel had sunk to the bottom, resting on the bed-rock. The gold, washed out of ledges, now hidden in the hills, had been worn smooth or into fantastic forms as it was tumbled along in the current and over the rocks; it had been swept into the river, and had gone to the bottom with the gravel and stone. The sand had followed it, and the soft soil which settled in, as the stream slackened its current and became shallow, filled in all the interstices. Strange changes took place in the surface of the country. Hills rose up where none had been before, and grass, shrubs, and trees grew luxuriantly where once a river had flowed swiftly along. In Crowbait Gulch, for instance, the water almost ceased. The winter rains washed down the soil from the surrounding hills, and covered the

rocks, the gravel, the gold, and the sand. Each season added its deposit of vegetable loam, and grass, wild roses, chaparral, and manzanita bushes grew up, as if to hide the golden secret which lay buried far beneath.

Into this tangled thicket, broken only by the bed of a little stream, and by a few grassy spaces, came the young treasure-seekers. Countless ages had been necessary to prepare for them. While centuries came and went, this wonderful work had gone on unseen. The gold had been rolled and tumbled, age after age, until it was rounded or smoothed like water-worn pebbles, and, while generations lived and died, not even knowing of the existence of this wonderland, the precious ore, for which men go so far and work so hard, sunk into its latest resting-place, and was covered from all human eyes. But not forever, for into this primeval solitude, in the fulness of time, had come the new masters of the mine.

The gold was laid in Crowbait Gulch for the boy emigrants. But it was not yielded up to them without a struggle. Mont dug manfully, Arthur helping him at times, and at times packing the earth and gravel to Hi and Barney, who squatted all day long by the bank of the stream, twirling, twirling their pans, until their eyes ached and their heads reeled with the constant whirling of water, sand, and gravel—water, sand, and

gravel, round and round again. Not every panful of earth held gold. Very often it happened that the patient labor required to wash out a pan brought nothing but disappointment. Nevertheless, it was fascinating business. As the soil disappeared over the edge of the pan, and the sand began to show through the clearing water, the washer might expect to see the golden gleam of the ore. Or he saw nothing but common sand and gravel; and he began again with the hope that never died in him.

Hi grew intensely interested in the work. He was continually expecting to find a big lump. He washed eagerly, almost feverishly. If he found a few rich grains of gold, his eyes sparkled, and his face beamed with pleasure. If his pan showed nothing but barren sand, his countenance changed, and he scooped up a fresh panful of earth with a mutter of impatience. He was seldom rewarded by any marvellous return, and when Barney, one day, washed out a lump of gold as large as a hickory nut, Hi broke out in open rebellion against his "luck," and he regarded Barney's find with eyes of covetousness, as if it were not one more acquisition to the common stock. Then, another day, when Arthur, uttering a cry of joy and triumph, dug out a lump of gold almost as big as that first found by Hi, he threw down his pan with an exclamation of disgust and "allowed" that he had washed long enough.

He would take his turn at digging. And so he did, until after a while Mont, thinking that Hi was growing thin and haggard with that work, exchanged places with him again, and Hi went back to the pan.

One day, while all hands were hard at work in and around the gulch, a voice up the thickly wooded hill cried: "Hello, you! How does a fellow get down?"

"Slide," said Mont, with a smile, as he straightened himself up from his toil and looked up the ridge. There was a crashing and rustling in the brush, and presently a small cart came down the steep slope backward and dragging after it a familiar figure. It was Bush. His wagon had lost its cover, and he was partly harnessed in the traces, as his little cow had been.

Breaking through the undergrowth, and half-riding, half-tumbling, Bush and his go-cart reached bottom at last. Bush was brown, ragged, and as cheerful as ever.

"Sh'd think you might hev' a road for visitors, leastways," he managed to say, when he could catch his breath. Then, having disengaged himself from his rude harness, he advanced with both hands outstretched, cordially exclaiming, "I'm lookin' for the honest miners of Crowbait; and I reckon I've struck 'em at last. Shake!" and Bush warmly greeted his old companions.

"Where's your cow?" asked Barney, when their former comrade had been duly welcomed.

"Wal, Suke, you see, she up and died one day. After I left you at the divide, I struck off toward the north part of the Yuba, and a powerful rough time we had of it. No trail—rocks, gulches, and precipices till you can't rest. Suke was more or less alkalied on the Plains, I reckon; and the pull through the timber was too much for her. She pegged out one night, and the coyotes picked her bones before day. Poor Suke!" and Bush twinkled a genuine tear from his eye, as he thought of his vicious little cow.

"Well! how are you making it," he continued briskly; "struck it rich?"

"Yes, we're doing first-rate," answered Barnard, heartily.

"Oh, not so powerful rich, though," said Hi, with an uneasy glance at the rest who were gathered around. "Just a livin', you know."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of me," said Bush very frankly; "I ain't a-goin' to stay here; I'm just a-pushin' my way across to Dogtown, where I hear there's great diggings. Thought I would take Crowbait on my way. I seen Rose over on the North Yuba. He told me where you were, and when I inquired for 'the Boston boys,' I learned you was Crowbait. Crowbait! I s'pose that means Old Jim?"

"Yes," laughed Arty, "poor Old Jim, who ought to have died on the Plains, has lived long enough

to give us his name. How's your luck at mining, Bush?"

"Well, just ornery; just ornery, boys," and here Bush fished out of the bottom of his go-cart a canvas shot-bag, which he untied, and poured therefrom into his gold-pan about ten ounces of gold-dust. "I should say about one hundred and fifty dollars' worth. That's all I've got to show. And that there cow of mine would have fetched almost twice as much if she'd lived."

"Where did you pick up that dust?" asked Mont.

"Oh, in spots; just in spots; I haven't worked reg'lar anywheres. No sooner do I get squared off for a wrastle with the pick and shovel than I hear of a better place, and I can't stay."

"Why, you ain't earnin' great wages," said Hi, disdainfully.

"Sure's you live," rejoined Bush, with a sigh. Then, brightening up, as if recalling a pleasant thought, he said: "And do you believe it, boys, a feller over on Rattlesnake Bar had the cheek to offer me day wages. Fact, he did!" he added at the expression of surprise on the boys' faces.

"How much?" asked Tom.

"Why, twenty dollars a day, and found. Did you ever see such a fool?"

"What! so much?" exclaimed Arty.

"Much! much!" almost screamed Bush. "What do you take me for? D'yer s'pose I'm a Josh to come away over here across the Plains to work for wages? Not much," he added scornfully. "I'm goin' to strike for a pile."

But Bush, if he had not made much money, had been busy enough collecting news of all his old acquaintances. He consented to stay over night with the boys, and gave them all the information he had concerning the country and the people in it. Philo Dobbs, Nance, and her mother were over near Sable Mountain. When last heard from they were stopping in a camp of Maine men, whose little settlement and diggings were called Bangor. Dobbs had "struck it rich"; then he had invested it in gold in a new claim, and had lost it, and all this had happened in a week or two. Messer was still "down on his luck," and was over in the San Joaquin country somewhere.

"Then there was that Dot-and-carry-one chap," added Bush.

"Yes!" exclaimed Arthur, "Bill Bunce."

"Bunce was his name. But he is 'Dot-and-carry-one' in places where he stays now. 'Dot,' for short, I should say. I heard of him. He's down on the next branch to this, making money hand over fist. A fool for luck, I say. Not any for me."

Bush gave the boys a great many valuable hints

about mining. Though he had not been himself successful, he knew how to instruct others. Particularly he urged them to get a rocker; it would wash as fast with one man to run it as ten men could with pans. A rocker, or cradle, he showed them, was merely an oblong box, open at one end, and made to rattle like a winnowing machine by shaking. In this the earth was washed, precisely as in a pan, but with much greater speed and thoroughness.

The boys told Bush that they had resolved to stay where they were all winter. He shook his head at this and said:

"I never have seen any man that has been in this country much longer than we have. Nobody's been here over one winter, 's far's I know. But the Injuns, *they* say the snow's right deep up this far in winter. If you winter it here, you may as well get up a log-house. You'll freeze in this cloth tent. It's gettin' on to November now, and the nights are fallish already."

This was a new view of the situation to the boys, to whom the climate was utterly unknown, and about which they had taken no thought.

Bush pushed on merrily next morning, and, as the boys watched him on his way up the branch, shoving his go-cart before him, he stopped in the midst of his song and called back:

"How about grub?"

"Plenty for the present," answered Mont.

"Lay in enough before snow flies, or you'll get pinched before spring. There's traders down to Nye's Ranch and that's your place to buy."

With this farewell warning and advice, Bush waded deliberately into the stream, forded it, poured the water out of his broken boots, whistled cheerily to himself, and disappeared up the bank.

CHAPTER XX

HOUSE-BUILDING

To build a house without lumber was the next task which our boys were to attempt. The Mexicans, commonly called "Greasers," who had set up a jig-saw in their saw-pit down the river, asked such enormous prices for the few boards and planks which they produced that the boys were at once discouraged from buying of them. Lumber was in demand for cradles, sluice-boxes, and other mining appliances, and the green stuff got out at Greasertown was all that could be obtained in that region of the country.

But the lads were bent on having a house over their heads. They must build it themselves. They had no money to pay laborers with, for their little accumulation, handsome as it was to them, would not go far toward hiring assistance, even if there had been men to hire.

But timber was growing on the hills near them, and they had nearly tools enough to build a cabin with, and what they did not have, their good-natured neighbors at Forty Thieves were willing to lend. Choosing

out the clean, slender pines and firs of the forest above, the young settlers cut down enough to make the walls of their hut. Trimmed and cut into lengths, these were "snaked" out of the woods by their single yoke of cattle, now brought into use once more. Then, a suitable underpinning of solid logs having been prepared, the tree-trunks were notched at the ends, so as to fit into each other.

It was heavy work handling these logs, and the younger boys were almost in despair when they reflected that the upper part of the cabin walls must be made by hoisting the sticks to a height above their heads. But Mont soon showed them that, by raising one end of a log on the unfinished structure, and sliding the other end up on an inclined stick of timber, each timber went into its place, and the walls steadily arose until the pen, as it seemed to be, was eight logs high, and just about as many feet from the ground. This was the work of days, and the boys surveyed the result of their labors with admiration.

"Gracious goodness!" exclaimed Arthur, "we've forgotten the doors and windows."

"Sure enough," said Mont, with a comical smile. "How shall we manage to put them in, now that the walls are up?"

"Will the whole thing have to come down again?" asked the boy anxiously.

Hi burst out laughing, and said:

"Mont knows a thing or two. All we have to do now, Arty, is to cut one hole for the door, and a couple more for the windows."

"But the logs will all fall out if they are cut in two in the middle."

"We chink up the logs first, Arty," explained Mont, "so that they cannot fall apart, then we saw out the openings."

"Where did you learn all that? In Boston?" demanded Arthur.

"Oh, he's got a head onto him, he has," murmured Hi, with an admiring look at Mont, who, somehow, was the "boss carpenter" of the house in the wilderness.

Hi, it must be confessed, did not take kindly to house-building. He found the work very "disagreeable," as he often remarked. He had chopped timber in in Sugar Grove times enough before now; but this labor he thought was unprofitable. It interfered with mining. He looked longingly at the neglected pans and picks while he was hauling logs, hewing timber, and splitting out "shakes" for the covering of their roof. And one moonlight night, Mont, hearing a strange noise outside as he awoke from a deep sleep, crept out and saw Hi making a pan of earth by the side of the creek, Pete sitting by on his haunches, an interested spectator.

"Why, what's the matter, Hi?" asked Mont; "haven't you done work enough to sleep on?"

Hi looked a little confused and startled, and replied:

"'Pears like I couldn't sleep to-night. I dreamed of finding a big chunk of gold up there by that there bowlder. So I thought I'd come out and shake the old pan for a while."

Mont put his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder and said:

"My dear old fellow, I am afraid you are getting avaricious. Don't let us try to be rich in a hurry. You will get sick with overwork and anxiety, and then where are you?"

Hi, with a little heat of manner, and growing red in the moonlight, said:

"I allow my health's my own. I put my gold into the company, don't I?"

"But that isn't the question, Hi. It makes me sorry to see you growing so careworn and old before your time. We have a good claim, and nobody can take it from us——"

"I'd like to see 'em try it on!" broke in Hi.

"And, as I was saying," resumed Mont, "nobody can take it from us. We shall have it in the spring. We can live comfortable until then. What's the use of being in a hurry?"

"What!" exclaimed Hi, almost with horror. "Knock

off washin' until spring? Not if I know it!" and he shook his pan with new energy.

"Hillo! what's up now?" and as Barney asked that question, he struggled out of the tent, half awake, and with a blanket clinging about him.

"Here, you, Crogan," cried Arty from within, "bring back my blanket!"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Mont, cheerily, "only Hi has had a dream of gold, and he has come out to find it in his pan. I followed to see it come true."

"Did it come true?" asked Barney, grimly.

"Not yet."

"And it's a nice time of night for you to be out here washing gold," said Arty, who had crawled out into the moonlight, and was trying to read the time on Barney's white-faced watch. "Past two o'clock, as I live! Hi Fender! you're as crazy as a loon! I'm ashamed of ye!"

"Well, if you are all going to make a row about it, I'll go back to bed." And back to bed he went, saying to himself, "I allow that Arty's just about half right, anyhow."

Notwithstanding Hi's discontent, the cabin rose. Light spruce poles formed the rafters of the roof, and these were covered with shingles, or "shakes," split out from the beautiful white pine of the region. Rudely hewn timbers supported the floor, which was made of

thick, oblong blocks, called "puncheons," split from the short lengths of oak which had been chopped in the forest. A hole was cut in the rear, and a huge fire-place of stone was built in it, with a chimney of bricks piled "cob-house fashion," and plastered with mud, leading above the roof. Two openings, protected by cloth from their wagon-cover, furnished light and air. Boards, sparingly taken from their wagon-box, furnished a door and material for a table and bench within. The chinks between the logs were filled in with sticks, dry grass, and clay. The house was done, and Arty, having lettered the name on a spare scrap of canvas, and fastened it to the front of this new castle, christened it "Boston," amidst the applause of his comrades. Hi meditatively cocked his head on one side and said:

"I never did like Boston for a name, but it's enough sight better than Crowbait."

While they were yet admiring the general effect of their new home, a lame man, wearing a slouched felt hat, a red shirt, and a pair of canvas trousers, slid painfully down the bank, dropped his kit of mining tools with a sigh of relief, and said: "Mornin'."

Arthur and Tom looked at him with amazement, and Barney, with elaborate politeness, said:

"Good morning to you, Mr. William Bunce."

"Knowed you'd know me! Yes, I knowed it," and

Mr. William Bunce rubbed his game leg, as if he thought it a great joke. "Fixed up mighty comfortable here. D'ye allow to winter here?"

"Yes, we allow to winter here," replied Hi, with some asperity. "What mischief are you up to now?"

"See here, stranger," replied Bunce, "I ain't up to no mischief, leastways so long as I'm civil spoken to. It's the boss of this ranch I want to see—Boston, is it?" and the man looked curiously at Arty's sign. "I was told it was Crowbait."

"Who told you it was Crowbait?" demanded Barnard.

"The man with the go-cart. I disremember his name—Woods?"

"Bush?"

"That's the name. I knowed it war something to do with woods."

"Well, what's your will with us?" asked Barnard.

The man fumbled about his shirt, and took out a buckskin bag, in which was a handful of gold-dust and a greasy wad of paper. Smoothing the paper on his knee, he read from it in silence, lifted up his head, and said:

"Thar war a man."

"Well," said Mont, for Bunce had stopped.

"Whar's the kid?" he asked.

"Who? Johnny?"

"That's what you call him."

Johnny was called from the gulch, where he was experimenting with pick and shovel. As soon as he saw Bunce he shrunk back and took shelter behind Mont. Bunce grinned and began again:

"Thar war a man. His name war Jenness, M.D. Leastways, that thar war on his shingle in Lick Springs, Vermilion County, Illinoy. He had a widder sister a-livin' in Ogle County, Illinoy, likewise. She up and died, leavin' a little boy. Jenness, M.D., I allow he war the boy's gardeen. He got the boy. Now thar war property—how much I never heerd tell; it war the kid's if he lived, and Jenness's if he didn't. Do ye begin to savvy?"

His listeners nodded assent.

"In course, you see, then, that that thar little kid is the boy. Jenness, M.D.—well, he ain't no doctor, leastways not more'n a hoss doctor—Jenness, he tole me and Eph Mullet, if we'd take the boy, like we war agoin' to Californy, and get shut of him somehow, he'd gin us our outfit. So he did."

"And you got your California outfit for promising to make away with this boy, did you?" asked Mont, with a shudder.

"That's about the size of it. But, mind ye, we only got part of the outfit; it war only a matter of a hundred dollars or so. There war two of us."

"The smaller the price, the meaner you were," exclaimed Barney, with a great glow of indignation.

"Thar wa'n't no crime. Yon's the kid; I've nothin' ag'in' him. He's alive and kickin'; but Jenness, M.D., he thinks he's dead."

"Can you give us any clue by which we can ascertain this boy's parentage?" asked Mont.

"Which?" said the man, with a vacant stare.

"Can you tell us how we can find out the boy's real name, and the names of his father and mother?"

"All I know is—Jenness, M.D., Lick Springs, Vermilion County, Illinoy. Kid's mother was in Ogle County, some such name as Brownbecker——"

"Bluebaker!" exclaimed Hi.

"You've struck it, stranger. Bluebaker is the word. I know'd it had a blue or a brown onto it."

More than this they could not extract from Bunce. His information was limited, or he was determined to tell no more. Here was enough to begin an inquiry upon, at any rate. Johnny had never heard the name of Bluebaker. He had been called "Johnny" always. He was not at all moved when Arty said that he might become heir to something handsome, by and by.

Bunce listened to the questions and comments of the party, and then began again.

"Thar war a hoss."

He paused, but nobody made reply, and he went on:

"A yaller hoss."

"A sorrel," corrected Barney, "with a raw-hide braided halter about his neck." And here he drew that article of horse-gear from a heap of stuff on the ground.

The man's eyes flashed recognition when he saw the reata, and Barnard continued:

"This was on the sorrel horse which was ridden into our camp near Thousand Spring Valley, and the man that was shot off that horse had another just like it around our Old Jim's neck. He was a horse-thief."

The man never winced. He said: "Stranger, that yaller hoss war mine."

"How came he in our camp?"

"He war stole from me in Echo Cañon. I tracked him into Salt Lake City; thar I lost him."

"How did you know we knew anything about him?" asked Mont.

The man turned uneasily on the stump where he sat and said: "The go-cart man told me you had a yaller hoss."

"So we had."

"*Had?*"

"*Yes, had,*" answered Barney, impatiently. "That yellow horse, as you call him, was drowned in Seven Mile Cañon on the day of the great cloud-burst."

The man slowly, as if in a deep thought, rolled up his greasy and crumpled paper, put in it his buck-skin pouch, drew the strings tight, put it in his bosom, stood up, and said:

"Powerful nice weather we're havin' now. Sure about that yáller hoss?"

"Sure. He was drowned with half of Rose's cattle," said Mont.

The man turned to go, gathering up his pack with an air of deep dejection.

"Give us that paper!" said Arty, eagerly.

"Oh, yes, let us have the memorandum," said Mont. "It will help us find out what we want to know about Johnny."

"It's got writin' onto the other side of it," said Bill Bunce. "Private writin' that I can't spare to give away. Write down what I've told ye—Jenness, M.D., Lick Springs, Vermilion County, Illinoy. Kid's mother was a Brownpecker. Ogle County, likewise."

"And that's the way you leave this matter, after you have confessed that you agreed, for money, to put this little chap out of the way," said Barney, bitterly.

The man turned and looked at him with a dim gleam of fire in his bleary eye, and said, "What are ye goin' to do about it?"

So saying, he stumped along the trail, perpetually rolling over on one side, as if to pick up something which he as continually changed his mind not to take. And so he rocked irresolutely out of sight.

CHAPTER XXI

AN EXPEDITION, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

Winter came suddenly. Early in November, the boys, climbing the long hill near their camp, could see that the sharp peaks of the Sierra, to the eastward, were covered with snow. The lower hills, or foot-hills, where they lived, were brown and sere; and looking westward, the Sacramento Valley was golden yellow in the warm sunlight, or violet and purple, streaked with gray, as the cloudy days came on. There were one or two rainy days, during which the creek rose rapidly, and the young miners improved the opportunity to wash out a good deal of loose dirt from their claim. Then came a sharp frost. The hills between the camp and the high Sierra were white with snow, save where the tall pines stood in solemn rows up and down these billowy slopes.

One morning, Arthur, shivering with cold and gaping with a great show of sleepiness, sat up in his bunk, and looking over to the window, which was only partly shielded by a bit of canvas, exclaimed: "Halloo, boys! it's snowing!"

They looked out and saw that the ground had disappeared beneath a soft, fleecy mantle. Woolly rolls of snow hung on the edges of the cradle by the creek. The pine-boughs bent under their moist burden, and the cow stood chewing her cud disconsolately under the shelter of a big hemlock tree near the cabin.

Mont looked grave, and said: "I must start for Nye's Ranch this very day."

Now Nye's Ranch was at the junction of the Yuba and Feather rivers, fifty miles away. It was the nearest depot for supplies, though a trading-post had been opened at Inskip, twenty miles northeast from Crowbait Gulch. But the Inskip trader brought his goods from Nye's Ranch, and his prices were enormous. Besides this, the company of Mexicans at Greasertown had promised to pay three hundred dollars, in gold-dust, for the ox and cow, the survivors of the teams of the young emigrants; and part of the bargain included the delivery of the cattle to the purchasers.

It had been agreed that Mont should go to Nye's Ranch, riding Old Jim, and deliver the cattle at Greasertown on his way down. The Spanish cattle of the country were thought good enough to slaughter for fresh beef. American cattle were too valuable to be killed. It was more economical to sell them and buy the meat needed for winter supplies. Flour, bacon, beans, and dried apples were required from Nye's

Ranch; and it was decided that no more time should be lost in getting them. Mont could drive the cattle down the creek and get the money and push on into the valley, buy the provisions, and pack them home on Old Jim.

The snow disappeared before the sun when it came out, that afternoon; and when Mont started on his journey, which was not until the next morning, the air was clear and bracing, and the sky was brilliant with sunlight. The boys saw him ride down the winding trail with real sorrow, for he drove before him their old friends, Molly and Star. These faithful creatures had been their sole reliance during the latter part of their journey; and though the cattle were no longer useful to them, now that they were camped for the winter, it was hard to part with them. If it had not been hard, Mont would have begun his journey to Nye's Ranch much earlier. As it was, Arty and Johnny looked down the trail with tearful eyes, when Mont, turning in his saddle, shouted back: "Don't eat up all the gold while I am gone."

Even Mont was a little heavy at the heart when he finally left the cattle at Greasertown, and rode away with his gold-dust stowed in a belt about his waist and under his flannel shirt. He had a long and solitary ride before him; he was loaded with what seemed to him a great deal of money, and, for the first time

since leaving Council Bluffs, he was separated from his comrades.

The rocky trail soon left the creek and entered a wagon-track, which, though it now seemed like a novelty of civilization to Mont, who had been living in the woods, was not so broad a trail as that in which he had travelled across the continent. His spirits rose as Old Jim loped gallantly on the trail, jingling the slender camp equipage tied behind the saddle, as he went. The air was absolutely hushed, and the wintry sun rained down its needles of light into motionless clumps of pines and spruces grouped in the narrow valley. On either side the hills rose up sharp and clear in outline against the sky, their rocky ridges dotted with a few trees along their lofty crowns. Occasionally a hare darted across the trail and was lost in the tangled ferns, or a gray gopher, with tail on end, drifted along ahead, like a leaf blown by the wind, and suddenly disappeared. A blue jay screamed and scolded from the tall top of a madroña-tree, and a solitary crow, flapping its way through the crystal atmosphere overhead, croaked and cawed, and then seemed to melt away into the hills of brown and green.

Just before Scotchman's Valley opens out into the valley of the Sacramento, the walls on either side rise up to a great height. On the south the ridge is over two thousand feet high, and is very steep and rugged,

except at a point near the base, where the sharp descent widens out into a shoulder, or bench. On this bench, about two hundred feet from the bottom, were perched two or three miners' cabins. Mont, when he reached this spot, looked at the cabins as he rode down the trail, and, wondering why the builders had chosen such a lofty spot for their homes, was tempted to climb the narrow trail and ask for lodging for the night, for it was now late in the day. But, reflecting that people in these parts were unprepared to take in strangers, though all were hospitable, he went on through the narrow pass, entered a round, flat valley which dropped gently to the west, and, between the openings in the groves of live-oaks, he saw the Sacramento Valley, laced with streams; Sutter's Buttes, a noble group of mountains, in the midst; and far away the sharp summits of the Coast Range, pink and white against the evening sky.

The young man made his lonely camp in a clump of dwarf pines, as night came on, and built his fire, toasted his bacon, made a pot of coffee, and, slicing off a cut from the loaf which careful Arthur had put up for him, he ate his frugal supper, with loving thoughts of the boys at home. The New England home seemed too far away now to be so much in his thoughts as the rude hut on the brink of Chaparral Creek; and as Mont hugged himself in his warm blanket, to sleep be-

neath the frosty sky, Barney Crogan, Hi, and the boys came and went in his dreams.

Following the course of the Feather and Yuba rivers, the streams of trade and travel, which had already begun to move in this new land, met on a flat and willow-grown angle where Nye's Ranch had been built. Here the Rio de las Plumas, or Feather River, received the Yuba River, and flowed on to join the Sacramento. Here, once a week, came a small steamboat from Sacramento, some fifty or sixty miles to the southward; and here were two or three trading-posts, built of sycamore logs and roofed over with canvas.

Mont had struggled across a wet and muddy plain, intersected with a labyrinth of small sloughs and streams. He found the little settlement a rude and noisy place. The ground was cut up with the tracks of many wagons, and trampled into a sticky paste by the feet of innumerable mules, whose braying filled the air. Miners, red-shirted and rough-bearded, were coming and going. The traders were excitedly rushing about, selling their goods and sweeping in the gold-dust. This precious stuff was weighed in scales, after being rudely fingered over on the board counter, to scan the grains separately; and Mont was amazed to see how carelessly the gold was handled. Apparently, there was no coin or paper money, but everybody had a buckskin pouch or a canvas shot-bag, in which the

golden dust was kept. Now and again some man from "the Bay," as San Francisco was called, exhibited a huge rude coin, valued at fifty dollars, and popularly known as a "slug." This was stamped with the name of the firm who issued it, and very readily passed for the amount it represented.

The little plaza, about which the settlement was flung like a strange and tangled dream, was crowded with men, wagons, cattle, and mules. A few miserable Indians, squatted around a big sycamore, looked on without manifesting the least interest in the scene; and a grizzly bear, caged in a canvas-covered inclosure, or corral, and exhibited for one dollar a sight, added to the confusion by uttering an occasional howl. A tent, with "Freeman's Express" painted on its roof, first attracted Mont's attention, and to that he straightway bent his steps. The boys had sent letters down to Sacramento by various ways, and Mont now deposited another lot, one of which, written to Farmer Stevens, in Richardson, Illinois, gave him the points of Bill Bunce's story about Johnny, and besought him to look up the case, if possible.

The tent was crowded with men inquiring for "letters from the States." There was no post-office here, but the accommodating expressman, in consideration of a few dollars' worth of dust, would take a list of names, send it to San Francisco, and bring up

the letters of people who made Nye's Ranch their trading-point. Miners far back among the hills sent to the Ranch by their comrades or nearest neighbors, and, in course of time, their precious letters, sifting through many hands, sought them out, and brought them tidings from home.

There were no letters for the boys at Crowbait. They had expected none, as their list of names had been sent to Sacramento. With a homesick and lonely feeling, Mont made his purchases as soon as possible, loaded them on Old Jim, and made his way out of the muddy and disagreeable little settlement. The sky was dark and lowering, and the sharp white peaks of the Sierra were lost in a gray mist, as he laboriously picked his way across the plain and camped for the night with a hospitable herdsman on the edge of Butte Creek.

When he resumed his journey, next day, the air was raw and chilly; a slate-colored cloud closed over the foot-hills, and a mild but exasperating drizzle pervaded the plain as he left it and began to ascend the undulations which here seem like a ground-swell, and, higher up, break into the tumultuous waves of the Sierra.

Mont pushed on impatiently, riding when the trail was easy, and leading his loaded steed where the way was steep and rough. Both horse and man were in haste to get home. Mont grew feverish and appre-

hensive as he saw the snow beginning to fall heavily, while he was yet only on his second day from Nye's Ranch. And when he camped that night in the manzanita bushes, it was with great difficulty that he could kindle a fire. But he found a partly screened spot, where the snow sifted lightly in, and where he could camp in comparative comfort. Jim was relieved of his load, and tied in a clump of trees which sheltered him; and Mont slept as best he could, and this was not sleeping well. His feet were sore with the chafing of a pair of new boots, put on when he left the trading-post, and now soaked with melting snow.

Next day, after Jim had browsed among the bushes, and Mont had swallowed a little hot coffee, they struggled on together, though the horse was now obliged to wallow in a deep mass of snow, and Mont desperately kept up by his side.

Passing laboriously through the round valley where he had made his first night's camp, Mont entered the rocky jaws of Scotchman's Valley. The day was well advanced, but the sky was dark with storm. Overhead, the air was thick as with a drifting whirl of snow. The black-green trees by the trail were half hidden and loaded with the snow. All trace of the route had vanished from the ground, and only a few landmarks, which Mont's practised eye had noted as he rode down the trail, served to show the way in which he should

THE HORSE WAS NOW OBLIGED TO WALLOW IN A DEEP MASS OF SNOW

go. There was the high, steep southern wall of the cañon, and there were the three cabins on the bench below the upper edge. Poor Mont noted in the blinding storm the blue smoke curling from the chimneys of the cabins, and he longed to be by the cheerful fireside which he pictured to himself was within. Like showers of feathers, moist and large, the flakes fell, and fell continually. Mont's feet were wet and sore and lame. Once and again he paused in his struggles and eyed the dismal sight around him, half-wondering if he should ever get through. The hapless horse panted beneath his burden, groaning as his master dragged him on through the drifts. Once, Mont, with numb fingers, untied the thongs that bound part of the load; then, passionately crying aloud, "No! no! I can't lose these provisions!" he made them fast again and labored onward.

He was now well up the cañon. Just opposite him were the cabins, and, as he looked up at them, the air began to clear. The snow fell only in scattered flakes, and the clouds showed signs of breaking away. Before him, however, the way looked even more hopeless than when it had been concealed by the falling storm. Behind, a few ragged, fading tracks showed where man and horse had struggled on in the drift.

Suddenly, a low and far-off moan broke on the deathly stillness of the air. Mont, scared and half-

delirious with excitement and fatigue, looked up toward the southern wall of the defile. The mountain-top seemed to be unloosed and falling over into the valley. The whole side of the ridge appeared broken off, and as it glided swiftly down, Mont noted with fascinated minuteness of observation, that a broad brown furrow showed behind it where the earth was laid bare. Down rushed the mighty avalanche. The whole defile seemed to shut up like the covers of a book. In a twinkling the three poor little cabins were wiped out as with a wet sponge. The pallid mass swept on with a roar, its huge arms flying up toward the skies. It was not so much a wall of snow as a resistless torrent, broad and deep. The young man stood still, his heart ceased to beat; yet he stood and gazed, unable to flee, as the avalanche thundered down from bench to bench, struck the bottom of the cañon, and spread out in a confused mass of whiteness. In an instant, horse and man vanished in a waste of snow. The narrow valley was filled, and only here and there, where an uprooted tree or a fragment of a wrecked cabin showed above the snow, was there anything to break the utter desolation.

CHAPTER XXII

PRIVATION AND DELIVERANCE

"I ALLOW this is dreffle disagreeable," said Hi. "Mont's been gone eight days; nothin' in the house to eat, and no neighbors within ten miles, so far's we know."

"And I'm powerfully hungry," chimed in Tom, who never missed an opportunity to make a complaint.

"I wouldn't mind," said Arty, once more going to the door and looking down the snow-covered trail. "I wouldn't mind, if we only knew Mont was safe somewhere."

Barney grumbled and said that it served them right for letting Mont go down into the valley alone. They were fools, he thought, for having stayed so high up among the mountains during the winter. If they had gone out when Mont went to Nye's Ranch, and had stayed out, they never should have seen any snow. There was no snow in the valley; and miners were "making money hand over fist" down on the American and the Stanislaus rivers.

"Yes, yer hindsight is fust-rate, Crogan; but I

wouldn't give much for yer foresight," snarled Hi, who was chafing under this long and enforced idleness.

Barney, without a word, took his gun and went out in the snow to hunt rabbits. There was neither flour nor meat in the cabin; but there was a plenty of coffee, some sugar, and a few beans. There was no immediate danger of starvation. Even at the worst, a few rabbits and squirrels could be snared or shot in the underbrush; and Arty had found that by crushing the dry berries of the manzanita, which still hung on the bushes, a very palatable sort of flour could be made. Barnard announced his intention of starving before he would eat such a mess, though Arthur argued that the Indians ate it and grew fat on it.

"But I'm not a Digger," was his brother's conclusive answer. "I'll starve first."

Matters looked even worse and more gloomy, four days after, when there was still no sign of Mont. Three of the boys, Hi, Barnard, and Arthur, went down the trail as far as Greasertown, anxiously looking for traces of their absent comrade. Greasertown was deserted. The six Mexicans who had lived there had packed up their light luggage and gone to parts unknown. On the rafters of their solitary cabin were placed two rude jig-saws, showing that the men intended to return. Drifts of snow were on the puncheon floor, and the wind sighed mournfully through the half-chinked walls

of the log cabin. A lonesome-looking chipmunk gazed at the intruders, as he sat upright in the window-sill; then he uttered a little exclamation of disgust and disappeared.

"Yer might have shot him," muttered Hi, as he took up a junk bottle which had been used for a candlestick, and thoughtfully put his nose to its mouth.

"What does it smell of?" asked Barnard, with some sharpness.

"Don't know," replied Hi. "I was a-thinkin' that I might eat this 'ere taller droppings, if the mice hadn't been before me."

Barney laughed, in spite of himself.

"Why, Hi, we are not so badly off as all that comes to yet. We needn't eat tallow candles, like the Esquimaux. We can live on rabbits, you know."

"There's no fat on rabbits, and I must say I'm just a-pinin' for somethin' fat," rejoined poor Hi.

They had not even candles in their own cabin; but as they sat that night around the cheerful blaze of their fire, Hi acknowledged that it was far better to have fat pine-knots to burn than fat candles to eat.

After all, the great burden on their spirits was Mont's mysterious absence. If they could only be sure that he was safe and well, they would be happy. At least, that was what Barnard and Arthur said, over and over again.

"How much money did Mont have, all told?" demanded Hi.

"Let's see," said Arty, reckoning on his fingers; "there was the three hundred he got for the cattle, one hundred you gave him to send home for you, two hundred Barney and I sent off by him, and two hundred of his own for his mother. Why, that's eight hundred dollars altogether!"

"Eight hundred dollars wuth of dust, and a hoss wuth nigh onto two hundred more, if he *is* old Crowbait. That's a good haul."

"What do you mean, Hi?" demanded Barney, starting up with an angry face.

"What do I mean?" replied the other doggedly. "I mean that it's a good haul for a feller to get away with. That's what I mean."

"Do you mean to insinuate that Mont has gone off with our property, you confounded sneak?" and Barney advanced toward Hi with sparkling eyes.

"I don't mean to insinerwate nothin' again' nobody, Barney Crogan. So keep yer temper. Ye'll need it bumbye to keep from starvin'. If some highway robber has corralled Mont with his dust, *that* would be a good haul for somebody, wouldn't it?"

"But there are no highway robbers about these parts. We have never heard of anything being stolen anywhere, though people leave their stuff lying around loose everywhere."

Nevertheless, as Barney said this, he sat down with a sore feeling in his heart. After all, they did not know much about Mont. The old joke about his "store clothes" was still a tender subject in the camp, and Hi's unworthy suspicions found a lodgment in Barney's mind, though his eyes filled with angry tears when he tried to think better of his old comrade. He struggled weakly against the cruel thoughts that rose in his mind. Then he reflected that the spare and unnatural diet to which they had been confined lately had reduced the moral tone of the camp. The young fellow rose and looked vacantly out of the little loop-hole in their canvas-covered window. The prospect without was not cheerful. The river was frozen over; the ground was white, and the sky was gray.

"Oh, well," said Arty, cheerily, "Mont is sure to come back. He's snow-bound, somewhere, I'm sure. Perhaps Old Jim gave out, and he had to lie by somewhere until he got better."

"*Pre*haps," said Hi, with a marked emphasis.

"And then," went on the boy, without noticing Hi's interruption, "we are bound to get through this somehow. As Mont used to say, I feel it in my bones."

"Yes," said Tom, with scorn, "more bones than meat."

"Shut yer mouth, you, Tom!" broke in his brother, angrily.

"Besides," added Arty, "mother used to say"—and the boy's voice quavered a little—"that the Lord will provide."

"I don't know," said Barney, gloomily, from the window. "It seems as if the Lord had gone off."

Arthur gave his brother a scared look, and remonstrated, with tears in his eyes, "Oh, don't, Barney!"

That night, for almost the fiftieth time since Mont had been gone, Hi lifted the puncheons of the floor in one corner of the cabin, scraped away the soil, and dragged out the can of gold-dust which formed the common stock. He smoothed it over, lovingly, in his hands, and let it drop back into the can with a sharp rattle.

"It's a heap of money," he said, with a sigh. "'T would buy a farm in Illinoy."

"But it won't buy a pound of side-meat in Crowbait Gulch," said Barney, with some ill-humor.

"Nary time," replied Hiram. "What's the use of gold if yer can't buy nothin' with it? Yer can't eat it, can't drink it, can't wear it"—and, as if trying the experiment, he took up a bright lump and bit it. "Blame the contemptible yaller stuff!" said Hi, with a sudden burst of rage. "What's the good of it now?" —and he tossed it into the fire.

The golden nugget struck the back of the fire-place

and dropped into the blaze, as if astonished at its rude treatment.

Arty, with much concern, attempted to poke it out, but Barnard said:

"Let it be; you can poke it out to-morrow, when Hi and the ashes have both cooled off."

Johnny, from his bunk, had looked on this curious scene with much amazement. He did not exactly understand why Hi, who usually was the greediest for gold, should now throw a piece into the fire. Then, why did he bite at it? He might have known that gold was not good to eat, and he had no business to throw it away like that when he found that he could not bite it. Then the lad remembered Mont's last words, "Don't eat up all the gold while I am gone!" It was very strange. So, thinking of Mont, and wondering if he would ever come back again, Johnny turned his face against the rough wall of the cabin and softly cried himself to sleep.

Next day, the sun rose so brightly and so clear that the little valley was deluged with an intense brightness almost painful to the eyes. Barnard awoke, and sitting up in his bunk, half-wondered what it was that had troubled him so much when he went to sleep. Then he suddenly remembered the privations and dangers of their situation; and he took up his burden of anxiety with a dull feeling of pain.

Arthur was already punching up the embers, and, with a little laugh, he poked out the lump of gold which Hi had tossed there the night before. "Ouch!" he exclaimed, as he dropped it to the floor, "it's hot as blazes!"

"Hard to get and hard to hold," remarked Barnard, soberly.

As the young miners gathered about their scanty breakfast, Johnny reminded them of Mont's last words about eating the gold.

"That was Mont's joke," said Barney, "but he little thought how near we should come to having nothing but that stuff to eat."

Just then there was a sound outside, as of trampling in the snow.

"What's that?" cried Hi.

"Grizzlies!" shrieked Tom; and everybody rushed to the door.

It was like a message from an outer and far-off world in that solitary wilderness. As they flung wide open the door, there was Mont, limping along with a sack of flour on his back, and behind him was Messer with another burden. Mont looked pale and worn, but he cried out, cheerily:

"Halloo! Crowbaits!"

His comrades crowded about him to relieve him of his load, shake his hands, and ask all manner of ques-

tions. All but Hi, who, with a great gulp, sat down on a bench and broke into tears. The other boys, though with moistened eyes and tender hearts, in this hour of their deliverance, looked upon the tearful Hi with real amazement.

"What's the matter, Hi?" asked Mont, kindly putting his arm on Hi's shoulder.

"I didn't allow I was so powerful weak," blubbered the poor fellow. "I must have been hungry, and, besides, I'm so glad you've got back, you can't think."

Barnard's face clouded for a moment as he remembered Hiram's suspicions. But Hi added:

"And I thought hard of you, too. Don't lay it up ag'in' me!"

"Oh, no," said Mont. "So long as you are all alive, I am thankful and happy. 'Here we are again, Mr. Merryman,' as the circus-man says," and the young fellow gayly slapped Arty's back.

But Mont was not in very good case, and when he told his story, they marvelled much that he was alive. The avalanche in Scotchman's Valley had swept down the miners' cabins, but, fortunately, the only man in either of them had heard the hum of the slide as it came. Running out he dashed into a tunnel in the rear of the cabin, where his comrades were at work, just in time to escape the flying mass which swept

down the hill-side and into the gulch below. Their cabins were gone, but they were alive, and thankfully they set themselves to recovering whatever was left of the wreck.

A dark spot on the tumultuous surface of the snow attracted their attention. It was a horse's head.

"Thar must be a man whar thar's a hoss, you bet," was the sage remark of one of them. So, leaving their own affairs, the men worked manfully until they had dug out Old Jim, for it was he—dead in the snow. Anxiously, the good fellows plied their shovels until Mont, insensible and nearly suffocated, was dragged out to the light. He was carried up to the tunnel, where a fire, chafing, and some hot coffee, recalled him to consciousness. But his mind wandered, and he could give no satisfactory account of himself.

"Must be one of them Boston fellers up to Crowbait, just this side of Forty Thieves," muttered one of the party. "He looks too high-toned for one of the Forty Thieves folks. Besides, they all left a fortnight ago; and what's he a-doin' down here?" And the puzzled miner scratched his head.

Mont could only murmur, "Don't eat all the gold up!"

Out of the wreck of their cabins the miners soon reconstructed a comfortable shelter. Mont's provisions were nearly all found and put by for him; and his

rescuers made him, and themselves, as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

When the young man, after a day or two, was able to sit up and tell who he was and where he came from, he found himself so weak and lame that he could not travel. He moaned over this, for he was filled with alarm for his comrades, waiting at home for food. More than a week was already gone, and his feet were yet so sore that it was impossible for him to move. He *must* go, if he had to crawl. The boys would starve.

His new friends tried to persuade him that his "pardners" would be able to get along on the game of the region, and that it was more necessary for him to get well than for him to take food to them. Mont fretted, and continually fixed his gaze on the narrow cañon entrance through which he must struggle on to Crowbait.

One day, while looking wistfully out over the gulch, he saw the well-known slouchy figure of Messer crossing on the snow, now fast melting away. Messer was loaded with pick, pan, and "grub." He had left his wife at Frenchman's Misery, down the valley, and had come up to join an old acquaintance in the hill-diggings, where Mont was now confined against his will.

It was a fortunate meeting. Honest Messer said: "You uns was kind to we uns on the Plains. I'll pack you clean up to Chaparral, if that'll do you any good."

Mont protested that he could walk; but he should be

glad for some assistance with his load. Messer expressed a williness to carry Mont and all the goods and provisions which poor Old Jim had so far brought. So, after one more day's rest, the two men set out with as much of the stuff as they could carry. The trail was difficult, but they managed to reach Greasertown at the end of their first day. Here they camped in the deserted cabin, and next day, bright and early in the morning, they pushed on to Crowbait. Mont had hoped to surprise the boys. But when he drew near, and none came to meet him, his heart sank. There was no sign of life when he came in sight of the cabin. The sun was up, but no smoke issued from the rude chimney.

"Have they become discouraged and gone away?" he asked himself, with growing alarm. Then a pale blue wreath of smoke curled up from the chimney. "That's Arty! God bless the boy!" murmured Mont to himself.

Now he heard voices within, and the door opened. He was at home at last. All was well.

"It was a tight squeak you uns had of it," remarked Messer, solemnly.

Barney, standing behind Arthur, affectionately put his hands on the lad's shoulders, and said:

"But this little chap reminded us that the Lord would provide."

CHAPTER XXIII

LUCK IN STREAKS

Mont did not readily recover from his sickness. During the remainder of that winter, which yet had many privations in store for them, he was infirm in health. The boys had anxious hours and days. There was no physician in the region; their own slender stock of medicines was not of much avail in a case of serious sickness like this; and more than once the tender-hearted Barney, who could not endure the sight of his comrade suffering without remedy, went hastily out among the snow-covered hills, and, in the death-like waste of the forest, tried to find relief for his pent-up and sorrowful feelings.

It was not until the snow had melted, the wild geese had begun to clamor in the sky, and the ripple of the creek along its pebbly bars was heard once more, that Mont fairly recovered. The log cabin was continually damp, and as little sunshine could pour into it through the winter, it was not a good place for a sick man. But when the doors and windows were thrown open wide, and the warm rays of the early California spring

flooded the little house with sunlight, the invalid recovered rapidly, and the shadow of a great trouble passed away from the household.

With the re-opening of the trails came new and old acquaintances. Almost before the snow had melted from the mountains above them, prospectors came hunting through the hills for gold. Many of these were newly arrived in the country, and they had already begun to think that the gold of the lower valleys was "played out," and that the precious stuff must be sought higher up in the Sierra. Nevertheless, all of these had gold-dust with them, which they handled as carelessly as if it had been common dirt. Each man carried a little pair of scales about him, with which he weighed the ore when he bought or sold anything; for, as yet, there was no coin and no other currency than this. With these emigrants, too, came all sorts of queer contrivances for separating gold from the earth in which it was found. Machines invented in "the States," or on board ship, by men who had never seen the mines, were carefully brought up to the diggings at great expense, and then thrown away. After all, the cradle, or rocker, was the best, simplest, and cheapest gold-separator then known. It could be carried on a mule's back, or a stout man could easily pack it on his own back, from place to place. So, in due time, the trails to the mines were strewed with the useless con-

trivances for mining, which were discarded for the homely and labor-saving cradle.

With the spring, too, came news from home. Some of their neighbors at Forty Thieves brought up a package of priceless letters from Sacramento for the boys. Barnard and Arthur did not think five dollars too much to pay for a fat envelope from Sugar Grove; for that packet contained a wonderful letter of many pages, in which father, mother, sister, and each one of the brothers had written something. It was a marvellous production, written during the early winter evenings, and the two boys read it over and over again with almost tearful delight. It seemed strange to read in those distant solitudes of the white calf which had been born to Daisy, and of the marvellous crop of bellflower apples last year. Barnard put down the closely written pages which told him how the wheat crop had turned out in the ten-acre lot, how the pigs had been sold to Jim Van Orman, and how Jedediah Page was married to Dolly Oliver, and Father Dixon had been presented with a gold-headed cane by the citizens of the town. As the boy looked away from these simple annals of his far-off home into the trackless forests which clothed the flanks of the Sierra Nevada, he seemed as one in a dream. He was obliged to look about him to be sure that he was in California and not in Illinois. The picture of the old homestead at Sugar

Grove, the red barn, the well-sweep, the family about the big kitchen-table, and the neighbors dropping in to chat, now seemed something that existed in some other world than this.

Hi and Tom also had their budget of home news, which was none the less welcome, probably, because the handwriting was rugged, and because, as Hi expressed it, the dingy letter-paper "smelt confoundedly of ter-backer-smoke." Old man Fender and his wife dearly loved a pipe when any serious business, like that of letter-writing, was in hand.

Mont went away by himself to read his long, long letters from Cambridgeport. He had two sets of these —one in the stately, erect handwriting of his mother, and the other crowded full of fine hair-lines, expressing, doubtless, very comfortable sentiments, for the boys observed that Mont improved in spirits whenever he read these. The young man was always light-hearted, as of old.

"I wouldn't mind giving you a bit of one of our letters, Johnny," said Arty, genially, as he saw that the friendless little lad looked on the happy circle of readers with a longing face, "only I suppose it wouldn't do you any good. You might 'play' that it was from your sister."

"I don't mind it a bit," said Johnny, stoutly, "but it is sort of hard-like that I've got nobody to write to

me. Nobody, nobody!" and the lad's eyes filled with tears, in spite of himself.

Nevertheless, there was news about Johnny. Farmer Stevens had made inquiries, and had found that one Doctor Jenness, known as a veterinary surgeon, otherwise "horse-doctor," lived at Lick Springs, Vermilion County, and that his sister, name unknown, had married some years ago, and had subsequently died in Ogle County, leaving a little son and some property. So much was already discovered by way of a beginning, and the good man was sure he should be able to trace the rest by-and-by. Johnny heard the story without much interest. Arty was excited to know that his father was on the track of Johnny's parentage. It had been a great mystery to him. He was sure some great thing might happen yet. But Johnny was satisfied with his present condition, and was at home with his new friends. Beyond these he had no concern whatever.

As soon as the frost was out of the ground, the boys went to work again with a hearty good will. They had put their mining tools in order during the winter leisure, and their very first ventures into the claim were richly repaid. They had worked well up toward the upper end of the gulch, skinning off the top soil and digging up the pay dirt next to the bed-rock. One day, Mont, who was manfully tugging away with his

returning strength, fairly shouted with delight, as his shovel turned up a broken mass of gold, shining in one magical cluster. The boys came running, and stooping down, with hooked fingers, Hi eagerly clawed out the loose earth. There, in a narrow crevice in the bed-rock. like eggs in a basket, were thirteen lumps of bright, yellow, solid gold, some as large as butternuts, some smaller, and some about as large as marbles. They were all irregular in shape, but all were smoothly rounded as if they had been rolled and rolled for ages in the bed of some swiftly moving stream. The earth was closely packed about them, and even in this soft bed appeared shining particles, which would have excited their expectations if they had not now the great luck in their grasp.

"I allow there must be at least fifty thousand dollars in that there hole!" said Hi, feverishly, as he fingered the glorious "chispas."

"Oh, Hi, you're crazy!" broke in Barney. "There isn't more than ten thousand in the whole lot, if there is so much. Gold-dust is mighty deceiving, you know."

"Well, let's go for the nest," said Tom, valiantly brandishing the pick. "May be we'll strike another such nest deeper down."

But this was a vain hope. The dirt was carefully scraped out of the little hole where the gold had been found. When washed, it paid well, though not in big

lumps. The boys dug all around the lucky spot without finding any more rich deposits. Hi left his rocker by the creek, in order to be on hand when the next "big strike" was made; and he grew fretful as days went by and only fair wages were returned for their labors.

Meantime, loving letters to the folks at home were written, and a modest return of their first great luck was also sent. The actual value of their find, after all, was not nearly so great as it had seemed. Gold-dust, as Barney had truly said, is deceiving. Their mine had yielded, since spring had opened, ten thousand dollars, of which about one-half had been found in what Johnny called "the lucky hole."

So, with the letters home went a package of gold-dust. Mining operations had thickened so among the mountains that Freeman's Express Company had pushed its agencies far up into the Sierra. Mounted messengers collected and delivered letters and small parcels, and no sight in all the year was so welcome to these exiles in the mountains of California as the lithe horseman, who, with his saddle-bags strapped behind him and his pistols at his belt, rode over the divide and plunged into the gulches where men were delving in the mines. Now they had money on the way home —"money in the bank," as Hi put it—and they returned to their work with new energy. They ran nar-

row trenches up into the slopes on either side of their claim. They sank holes in the edges of the bank, the central portion of the triangular gulch having been carefully worked over. One day, when they weighed up their gains for that day's labor, they found just ten dollars. Hi frowned, and said that "the youngsters" were getting lazy. Tom, as a representative youngster, resented this remark, and murmured something about punching Hi's head. Mont interfered in behalf of peace, and cheerily reminded them that there had been a time when ten dollars was a good show for a day's work.

"But that was when we were prospecting," said Barney, ruefully looking at the meagre little yield of gold. "Now we are supposed to be in a paying claim. Ten dollars a day is less than two dollars a-piece."

The next day's harvest was twenty-two dollars. The next was worse yet—only five dollars. But on the third day they washed out eighty-five cents!

An expert from Swell-Head Gulch was called in to view the premises. He walked over the ground, spitting his tobacco-juice into every hole, as though that were the magic means by which he was to divine the situation,—asked a few questions, and, when the lucky find was described, said, with great contempt:

"That war only a pocket."

Then he scooped up some of the earth next the outer

edge of the bed-rock last laid bare, poked it about in the palm of his rough hand, with a knowing air, and said:

"Boys, your claim is played out."

So saying, he stalked away, without giving the matter a second thought.

In an instant almost their castles in the air had tumbled. Barnard sat down on the ground in a most depressed condition of mind, saying:

"Just our luck!"

Hi growled: "And we've been and gone and sent all our money home."

Arty turned to Mont, and asked with his eyes:

"Well?"

And Mont said: "There's only one thing to do, boys. As Bush would say, we may as well 'get up and dust.'"

CHAPTER XXIV

WANDERING ONCE MORE

When the boys finally resolved to leave Crowbait diggings, they found it easier to remove than they had thought. Little by little they had reduced their outfit. The cattle had been sold, their horse was dead, the tent had been used up in various ways, the box of their wagon made into trunks and benches, and the running gear traded off for flour to a man who had happened that way early in the spring. Nevertheless, as they loaded themselves with their mining tools and slender stock of provisions, and made ready to turn their backs on what had been home to them, they could not help feeling sad. Since they had left the States no place had so long been their camp.

But their preparations for a tramp were soon finished, and, one bright spring morning, they marched up the creek. The faithful Pete, trotting along at Arty's heels, was very much surprised, apparently, at this sudden desertion of the old home.

"Good-by, old Boston!" said Arty, as they turned a bend in the river which would shut the log cabin from

view. "Good-by! we've had a good time and some hard luck with you."

"Good riddance to old Boston, I say," grumbled Tom, who was staggering along under the weight of sundry pots and pans. "I'm glad to get shut of the place. Too much work and too little gold."

"Oh, shut your mouth and come ahead," scolded Hi. "It appears like you all wanted to make speeches on the old shebang." Nevertheless, Hi breathed a long sigh, and set his face with a hard look, as if he was determined that he would not regret leaving their first home in California.

They had heard of Table Mountain as being a very rich mining region, and thither the little company of gold-seekers now bent their steps. Their way was along the foot-hills, covered with verdure, and knee-deep in wild flowers. The slopes were splashed with great patches of blue, white, orange, and yellow, showing where the wild larkspur, heliotrope and poppy grew in prodigal luxuriance. The pines and spruces were spicy with balsamic odors, and the air was soft with the early summer heat swept up from the Sacramento Valley.

Now and then they encountered a party of miners, two, three, or half a dozen, laboriously climbing the steep trails which led among the hills; and now and then they stumbled on others who were working at

claims which they had taken up by streams and in gulches. But, for the most part, the young lads had the country to themselves, as they tramped steadily onward to the north. It was a vast solitude, almost untrodden by the foot of man. The few prospectors who came and went were soon lost in the well-nigh pathless wilderness. There were no houses to be seen, no roads, and even the trails which they crossed occasionally seemed to have been traced since the snow had melted. Gray rabbits bounded out and in among the ferns. Ground squirrels set up their tails like banners, and drifted on before the wayfarers, and the parti-colored magpies screamed angrily from the bushes, as if resenting this intrusion of human strangers.

On the second day, climbing up a sharp ridge, late in the afternoon, they beheld a little village on the summit of the next divide. Between the ridge and the divide was a wide ravine, through which ran a pretty stream, and all along its banks the fresh earth was tumbled and heaped. A few rough-hewn beams and puncheons showed where men had been working. But no miners were in sight.

"Those fellows knock off work pretty early in the afternoon," said Barney, as the party rested on the ridge.

"Good diggin's and makin' lots of money, most likely," added Hi.

"From this distance their camp looks quite home-like," said Mont, "though I suppose we should find it mean enough when we get into it. But see how well that double row of cabins is set against the background of trees. If there was only a little paint on some of those shanties, it would look quite like a hamlet among the mountains of Vermont."

"Only you never see that nasty red earth among the Green Mountains," added Barnard, with disgust, for the natural scenery of the country never pleased him. It was "foreign," he said.

The boys wondered what the settlement was, and so, picking up their burdens, they scrambled down the hill-side, waded through the tall grass in the bottom, and crossed the creek on a rude little bridge, which had evidently been made to enable the miners to drag in their lumber from the woods near by.

"'Pears like as if these fellows hadn't been at work here lately," said Hi, curiously scanning the diggings. Water had settled in the holes where the miners had been digging. The only tools to be seen were worthless and rust-covered, and a broken sluice-box lay warping in the sun. It looked as if the place had been left for a night, and the workers had never waked again to their labors.

The boys climbed the divide and entered the settlement. It was divided by a single street or alley,

which ran through the middle. There were eight cabins on one side, and seven on the other. These were built of rough logs, hewn boards or puncheons, and one or two were pieced out with blue cloth, now faded and mildewed. Looking down the street, the lads saw that every door was open, and that most of these, swinging outward, had an unhinged and neglected look. Here and there, in the middle of the narrow street, was a scrap of cast-off clothing, an old hat, a broken tool, or a battered bit of tin-ware; and, thickly strewing the ground, were dozens of empty tins, in which meat, vegetables, or oysters had been preserved.

But nobody was in sight. Arty timidly peeped into the first cabin on the left. Nobody there. Tom blundered into the house on the right. Nobody there. So they went, almost holding their breath, half-suspecting a surprise, down through the little village. Every house was empty, silent and tenantless. All save one. In the last house on the left, where somebody had planted wild columbines about the door-step, and a few pink flowers were unfolding themselves, as if the old solitude of the place had returned, little Johnny started back in affright. In the gloom of the interior a pair of huge fiery eyes gleamed from one corner.

"Wha-what's that?" he stammered, and backed toward the door. Arty came and looked over his

shoulder, and when the eyes of the boys had become a little accustomed to the darkness, they descried a solitary cat sitting on a table strewed with bones, broken pipes, and bottles, the only surviving inhabitant of this deserted village.

"Poor puss!" said Arty, advancing toward her. Puss set up her tail, cried "Phit! Phit!" darted through the door, and disappeared in the under-brush, pursued by Pete, who was apparently delighted at seeing an old acquaintance. It was the first cat he had met in California.

The boys stood still with a sort of awe, which even the comical flight of the cat could not quite dispel. They were in a deserted camp. A village of the dead. Where were its inhabitants? Had a plague carried them off? If so, who had buried the last man? The untenanted settlement bore no sign to show who had lived here or where they had gone. Some unmeaning letters, hacked in the doorways, in moments of idleness, probably gave the initials of some of the vanished settlers; and a few rabbit-skins shrivelling on the cabin-walls, where they had been nailed by the hunters, reminded the visitors that destructive men had lived here. But that was all. The red sunlight sifted down in an empty street, and partly glorified the silent, shabby, and forlorn mining camp.

"These chaps have heard of some rich diggings

somewhere. They have been easily discouraged here. And they have packed up their traps in a hurry and vamosed the ranch." This was Barney's deliberate opinion, after he had surveyed the ground with some care.

This was the most reasonable explanation possible. Mont said that if the entire community of Swell-Head Diggings had vanished in a single day, bound for Gold Lake, as the boys knew, why should not a bigger settlement leave in a hurry, and make a rush for some other such folly?

"Anyhow, here's a house a-piece for to-night," added Mont, "and a plenty left for storage. We may as well camp here."

The young adventurers examined the habitations with a critical air, but finally agreed to keep together in one of the largest of the cabins. Arty declared that it was "too poky" to sleep alone in any one of these deserted mansions. Somehow the others were of the same opinion.

Next morning, when they straggled out into the early daylight, in answer to Mont's cheerful call, Barney crossly said:

"I thought you said this was a deserted village, Mont?"

"So I did."

" 'Tisn't so; there's plenty of tenants."

"I know what he means," said Arty, with a comical look.

"What then?" demanded Mont.

"Fleas!"

Everybody laughed. They had been long enough in California to find out that these were tenants which never caught the gold fever, and never vacated any premises whatever.

That day brought them, after frequent stoppages for prospecting, to the base of Table Mountain.

It was a long flat-topped eminence, almost perpendicular as to its sides, and shelving rapidly down into a well-wooded and broken country, cut up by small streams. All along these streams were good diggings, it was said, and the chances were promising for gold-mining almost anywhere.

In a broad, open space, through which a shallow creek poured over bars of sand and gravel, was Hoosier-town. Miners' cabins, tents and booths were dotted over the rocky interval, and all along the creek were men working like beavers. There were sluices, long-toms, cradles, and all sorts of contrivances for mining. At one place on the stream, the miners had run a dam out into the current from one bank, and then, curving it down stream, had turned it back again to a point a little below the side from which it had started. This was a "wingdam." By making it tolerably tight the

place thus inclosed was comparatively free of water. Rude pumps were also put in to pump out the water, and these were worked by means of "flutter-wheels," moved by the flowing water outside of the dam, very like the wheel of a water-mill. In this wingdam men worked with the water up to their middle. They dug up the bottom of the stream—sand, gravel, and stone. As the water sunk away and the bottom was cleaned, they found gold—gold in lumps and fine scales—which had been washed there in the far-off times.

This was going on all along the stream, and everywhere men were busy with various wooden machines, rude and clumsy, to be sure, but good enough for the present purpose.

The boys looked on with silent amazement. This was a real mining settlement. Here were more than one hundred men at work, and using machinery that had cost much labor and money. They seemed to be determined to get every scrap of gold, even though they had to wipe up the river, scrape down the mountain, and root out the forest. They were very much in earnest, anxious, without comfort, and for the most part haggard and ragged.

The borders of the once pleasant stream were gashed with diggings, and disfigured with cumbrous mining apparatus. Even upon the hill-sides the surface was dotted with heaps of red and yellow earth, where

greedy prospectors had burrowed in for gold. Along the valley, on either side of the stream, the cabins, with gaping seams open to storm or wind, weltered in the sun; and the barren and comfortless place wore a homesick look to the young gold-hunters.

Arty's quick eye detected a woman's frock hanging on the thorny branches of a manzanita brush near a cabin which looked less untidy than the others.

"Hooray! there's a woman in this camp, anyhow," said Hi, with enthusiasm, when Arty had pointed out the purple calico on the manzanita. "Let's go and take a look at her."

Rather shamefacedly, as if afraid of womankind, the lads straggled up to the cabin and dropped their packs on the ground. A comely young woman, brown in face and bare arms, but wearing a smart ribbon in her hair, came to the door with a sharp: "Are you here again?"

"Nance, with hoops on as sure as I'm alive!" exclaimed Hi; and his under jaw dropped clean down to express his utter amazement.

Nance blushed to the roots of her hair, and said: "Why, I thought it was that ornery feller, Missouri Joe; he's a sparkin' round here just continual."

"Howdy? boys, howdy?" broke in the good Mrs. Dobbs, who now came forward and looked over her daughter's shoulder: "We're powerful glad to see ye.

'Pears like old time to see you, boys. My old man was a-speaking about you no more'n yesterday."

Nance, recovering herself after her first surprise, welcomed the lads, and the whole party, seated on the door-step and about the cabin, exchanged all the news they had to tell. The Dobbs family had been here since the snow left, which was early, for not much snow fell in these parts. They had done well. They were doing well. Philo Dobbs had a "pardner," and the two had a wingdam, from which great things were expected. Yes, there were plenty of chances here. Why, even tunnelling had been tried, and from some of these holes men had got out gold, as Mrs. Dobbs expressed it, "hand over fist."

"Yes," she said, when Mont had remarked Nance's rapid growth. "Yes, Nance has got to be right peart of a gal. If she had a little more age onto her, and didn't kick up her heels now and then, she'd be quite a young woman."

"La, ma, how you do run on!" pouted Nancy, the blushes glowing through her brown cheeks.

"You see, we've put her into long gowns. Clothes is powerful dear in these parts, to be sure; but she's the only young lady in Hoosiertown, and I tell my old man, says I, something must be sacrificed to appearances, says I."

What with a hoop skirt, a long calico dress, shoes on

her feet, and a ribbon in her hair, Nance was really quite a changed person. Arty and Tom regarded her with an unwonted respect, and Hi blushed every time he looked at her.

The boys set up their camp in a deserted cabin which Philo Dobbs had once occupied, and which he gave them full use of for the present. At last! they were in a considerable community again. They felt almost as if they had got back into civilization. At night the notes of a violin and a flute from one of the cabins showed that the tired miners were solacing themselves with music, and sounds of talk and laughter floated on the evening air. After all, "it was homelike to be among folks again."

So said honest Hi, as the boys contentedly sat about the door of their new home. Then, clasping his hands over his knees, Hi looked absently at Pete, who was winking and blinking at him, and added: "And she's the only young lady in this yere town!"

CHAPTER XXV

A SEPARATION AND A CALAMITY

A GREAT variety of mining was carried on in the vicinity of Hoosiertown. As we have seen, the stream was lined with works for extracting gold in several different ways. And, back from the valley, in the low hills of the region, were some of the operations known as "dry diggings"; here the earth was pierced to a great depth by perpendicular holes, or shafts. Sinking through the dirt which had no gold in it, the miner finally reached a layer of earth far under the non-paying mass, where coarse gold was found; then, striking this "pay-streak" underneath the ground, he dug it out carefully and hoisted it up to the surface where the gold was washed out.

They burrowed in all directions as long as the pay-streak led them on; and the holes thus made were so much like the dens of coyotes, or little prairie wolves, that this sort of mining was called "coyoting." As the "coyoting" miner advanced with his burrow, far below the surface, crawling on his hands and knees, and laboriously dragging his basket of dirt to the shaft, where his partner hoisted it up, he was nothing more

nor less than a burrower. "Dirty work brings clean money," he thought; or his mind went back to wife, mother, children, and friends at home, as he dug in the gloom and silence far underground.

The earth thus undermined was propped up, as the "coyoters" burrowed in all directions, to keep it from caving in upon them. Usually the overhanging roof of the burrow was so tough that it needed no support. But it often happened that the mass settled and quietly shut down forever upon the workers below.

Prospecting over the hills with Philo Dobbs one day, Hi and Mont came upon a flat place where a considerable patch of the ground had settled a foot or two, leaving a ragged, brown edge to show how far the surface had dropped.

"This yere," said Dobbs, stepping into the middle of the depression, "is where the Redman boys was caved in on last fall. That there hole is where their shaft was."

"Caved in upon?" asked Mont, with a shiver. "How many of them were there?"

"There was the three Redman boys; they were from Maine, they was; two brothers and a cousin. Then there was a chap from Illinoy; name was Eph Mullet. They were the chaps that was caved on."

"Eph Mullet!" exclaimed Mont. "Why, Hi, that was Bill Bunce's partner. Don't you remember?"

"Sure enough," said Philo Dobbs. "I mind me now that that Bunce had a pardner, but I didn't know his name was Mullet. He and Bunce must have fallen out, for he was surely in the Redman party, and is buried under this very spot." And, as if to give emphasis to his words, Dobbs rose on his toes and came down heavily on his heels in the middle of this strange grave.

"And where was the man at the mouth of the shaft all this time?" asked Hi, indignantly. "Why didn't he run down to the camp at Hoosiertown, and give the alarm, and have these poor fellows dug out?"

"Oh, he got off safe. But as for Hoosiertown, that wasn't built then. This was last fall, and nothing had been done at Hoosiertown except a little prospecting on the creek by some stragglers, who had scratched about a bit and had lit out again for better diggin's. Here, you can see, where the survivin' pardner, as it were, started in to dig for his mates. But, Lor! he had to go down twenty odd feet. No wonder he gave it up as a bad job, and put out by himself."

"What a horrible story!" said Mont, looking at the sunken tract of earth which covered so much sorrow.

"Yas, yas," replied Dobbs. "There's any number of poor fellers huntin' for gold and leavin' their bones among these yere hills, in pits, ravines, and gulches, and their folks at home a-wonderin' why they don't

never turn up. Turn up! Why, they'll never show a hand till the Day of Jedgment." And Philo Dobbs thoughtfully picked up a bit of pay-dirt, and rubbed it out on the palm of his hand.

Coyote mining had a gloomy outlook to the boys, but Hi was very much fascinated with the hill-diggings which he saw some of the miners at work in. Some of these were nothing more than coyote holes run horizontally with the side of a hill, until the pay-dirt was reached. As these rude tunnels were easily dug, and the gold so found was coarse, the temptation to carry on that sort of mining was great. Hi declared in favor of hill-diggings.

But Mont and Barnard had found a place nearer the camp, which promised better. Besides, it was the only kind of mining that they knew anything about, and they were afraid of any new experiments. Hi was obstinate, and, moreover, he was tired, he said, of the old way, which had not been profitable enough. He wanted to get his money—lots of it—and leave. Miners were already going back to the States with their "piles." Poor Hi thought he must make his "pile" right away, and leave for home.

Mont and Barnard shook their heads sorrowfully. Mont kindly argued the matter with their obstinate comrade. But Barney indignantly blurted out: "Why, you wouldn't burst up the partnership, would you?"

"Yes," said Hi, doggedly. "I'll go into the hill-diggin's myself, if you don't. That is, Tom and I."

"Tom and I, indeed," broke in that young person. "I'd like to know what makes you think I'd go along with you. I'm goin' to stay with the rest of the crowd. If you want to git, git!"

"See yere, youngster," said Hiram, red with anger, "you are to go where I go. I'm yer gardeen; if you don't go with me, where's yer pardner? Who'll ye work with? The chances are all taken."

"I allow I'll work for myself," said the boy, sullenly. but somewhat in doubt.

"We're very sorry to have you think of going," said Mont, "but if you must go, Tom may as well go with you. Isn't that so, boys?"

The rest of the party took this view of the case, and after much consultation, it was agreed that Hi should draw out of the partnership, take his and Tom's share of the profits, and strike out for himself. The boys were all sorry over this first break in their company.

They sat uneasily about their cabin, in an embarrassed way, as if there was to be a ceremony of some sort which they dreaded to meet.

"Hang it all!" said Hi, with a shamefaced look. "I allow it is powerful mean for me to quit and go off by myself. D'ye 'spose it'll pay, after all?"

"You're the best judge of that," said Barney, coldly. "It's your own proposition."

"No, no," broke in Arty, eagerly, and leaning over the table toward Hi. "Share and share alike is always better than going it alone, you know. It's more sociable, anyhow."

Hi's eye softened a little as he looked in the bright face of the lad; but just then his hand struck the heavy canvas pouch in which his and Tom's portion of the company's savings had been put. He drew a long, hard breath, and said: "I allow I'll try the hill-diggin's."

At Arty's suggestion, Hi and Tom decided to mess with the boys for the present. The spot which Hi had fixed upon for his trial at tunnelling was not so far from the cabin that he could not come back at night, get his supper, and sleep.

Hi was secretly glad to make this arrangement. He would be willing to endure some additional fatigue rather than lodge elsewhere than with his old comrades. Besides, as he craftily argued with himself, it would be more economical.

Hi took possession of a hole, or tunnel, which somebody had begun to drive into a hill just above Table Mountain, to the north. Near this were two or three good claims in which men were busily at work and taking out gold. Hi's tunnel had been begun by two or three men from Poverty Hill, the deserted village on

the divide. When the rush from Poverty Hill to Rattlesnake Bar was made early in the spring, said a friendly Hoosiertown settler, these miners had tried their luck at river mining on Hoosier Creek. A week's work disgusted them, when they essayed hill-diggings, put in a few feet of tunnelling, and then were off to Trinity River—away up in the northern part of the State.

Hi now entered into their labors, accompanied with much grumbling by Tom. As for Barnard, Mont, Arthur, and Johnny, after prospecting about the flat near Hoosiertown, they took up and worked in a claim, not much unlike that which they had held at Crow-bait. They met with fair success at once, and, within a week, they "cleaned up" eight hundred dollars. This was encouraging. Hi, whose first question, when weary and fagged, he reached the cabin at night was always, "What luck to-day, boys?" heard the good news with ill-concealed chagrin, though he tried hard to rejoice heartily in the good fortune of his late comrades.

Nevertheless, Hi soon struck the pay-streak and began to bring home every night a goodly harvest from his day's work. Three ounces, four ounces, five ounces, and even ten ounces, did he turn out of his buckskin bag at the end of some day of labor. He spread the golden grains on the surface of their rude table, caressing the heap with real joy. Sixteen dol-

lars to the ounce was the rate of reckoning gold in those days, and at this rate, Hi had done well, for he had only just begun to work into the pay-dirt. He was very much elated by his good luck, and if everybody else had not been too busy with his own concerns to bother about those of others, he would have had the reputation of being a highly successful miner. As it was, his great wealth was chiefly in the future.

The whole company, meanwhile, got on very harmoniously in their cabin. They all went to work in the morning, taking their dinner with them. At night they met around their supper, talked over the events of the day, and speculated on the possibilities of tomorrow. It was a simple sort of life. They enjoyed it, and Nance, commonly known in the camp as "Dobbs's gal," was kind enough to receive a call from them once in a while, or drop in and give Arthur and Johnny a needless hint about cooking bacon and bread, which articles yet remained the staple of their fare.

Hi regarded Nance with bashful aversion. She made him blush in spite of himself; and once, when she reproved him for using slang, he grew very angry, and said she was "putting on airs." It must be confessed that the girl grew womanly, sedate, and almost dignified. She never seemed to forget that she was "the only young lady in the camp."

"Cut for home, boys," said Barney, cheerily, one afternoon. "The sun is down behind the lone pine, and it's time you were getting supper ready."

Arty and Johnny very gladly dropped their tools and climbed the hill which lay between the claim and Hoosiertown. The sun was sinking low, and as the lads passed over the brow of the hill and began to descend the slope on the other side, they could see the broken, perpendicular walls of Table Mountain gilded with yellow light.

The nearest edge of the mountain was low in places, with benches or ledges, running along just above the road which wound through the valley at the foot of the mountain. As the hurrying boys paused for an instant and looked off over the landscape, bathed in the setting sun, Arty saw the figure of a man stooping and running along the precipitous edge of the distant cliff, and occasionally stopping as if to watch something moving along the road beneath, which was not in sight from where the boy stood on the distant hill. Like a bird of prey, the man swiftly ran and watched, then stooped and ran, and watched again. Now and then he made a motion as if to drop something from his hand into the road beneath his feet. Then he seemed to think better of it, and he ran on, watching and waiting.

"Curious critter that," muttered Arty.

LIKE A BIRD OF PREY, THE MAN SWIFTLY RAN AND WATCHED

"Pshaw! it looks like Bill Bunce," answered Johnny, with a little start of disgust. "Let's run," and with that he trotted toward home as fast as his tired legs could carry him.

Just then the strange figure across the valley, now near the angle which Table Mountain makes where the valley opens out toward Hoosiertown, let fall something which seemed to be a heavy stone. Then he quickly pitched down another and another. Then he jumped over the edge of the cliff and scrambled down out of sight toward the road below.

"Queer boy Johnny is; always thinking of Bill Bunce!" so said Arty to himself, as he bounded along light-heartedly and overtook his comrade.

When they reached the cabin, Tom was there before them, and was already chopping the fire-wood for their evening cooking, and grumbling about his brother.

"Yes," he said, "Hi's always higgling and haggling. He's afraid to leave the leastest speck of gold anywhere about that confounded old tunnel over night. There's no thieves about. Honest country, I say. But Hi, he's dreffle suspicious. Sly folks always is."

Arty remonstrated with Tom for holding such a mean opinion of his brother, and Barney and Mont, who soon came over the hill, rebuked the lad for not staying with Hi to help him clear up his day's work.

"Hi is a good brother, anyhow," said Barnard

heartily, as he blew the water off his red face, and began to polish it with a coarse towel. "And, my little man, it stands you in hand to hold up your end of the yoke, as Arty says. Still, Hi is late to-night."

Just then four or five red-shirted miners, bearing some strange burden, came out from the mouth of the valley above and made straight for the cabin where our boys were making ready for supper.

They seemed to be carrying a wounded man; and as they drew nearer, the tender-hearted Barney burst out with, "My grief! it's poor old Hi!" And so it was. The miners, coming home from work, had encountered a figure sitting up in the dust and feebly trying to rise. There was a ghastly wound on the top of his head. His hair was clotted, and dark red stains were on his face. Groping about in the dazzling light of the sun, then level with the valley, Hi, for the miners recognized Hi Fender, had murmured something indistinctly, and had become unconscious.

The poor fellow was laid upon his bunk. Mont said at once, "We must have a doctor."

"Thar's nary doctor round hyar," said one of the miners, roughly but kindly. "Yer pard's hurt powerful bad. He may as well pass in his checks."

"Perhaps doctorin' will do him no good. But there's a young chap down to Smith's Bar who does something in that line."

It seemed an age to the sorrowful, anxious group in the cabin while Barney, mounted on the only steed in the camp, a fiery mustang, rode to Smith's Bar, four miles away, and brought back the doctor.

Meanwhile, Mont and Arthur bathed poor Hi's head, cleansed his face, and tried to relieve his sufferings. He only groaned and made no sign of intelligence.

Tom, heavy-hearted and remorseful, went on with the cooking of supper in an absent-minded way. The men who had brought Hi home said: "Just send word over to yon blue tent, if there's anything we can do for you—whisky, camphire, watchers, or anything the like of that." Then they went their way.

CHAPTER XXVI

A STRANGE CASE

Mont scrutinized with some sharpness and anxiety the doctor from Smith's Bar. He was a tall, lithe, sinewy young fellow, with a long, full beard, like a tangle of flax, a worn face, and cold, gray eyes. He wore a slouch hat and a blue flannel shirt; his trousers were tucked into his boots, and a belt at his waist carried a little wallet, where less peaceable people usually wore a pistol.

Arty was immediately disgusted with the cold, hard way with which the young doctor asked a few questions about the accident, and with the business-like and unsympathetic manner with which he studied the wounds of the unconscious Hi, who still lay breathing heavily and unable to speak.

"A queer-looking doctor, I must say," muttered Mont to himself, very much dissatisfied with his general appearance. And his thoughts went back to the white-haired, dignified physician of his New England home, a man whose presence seemed to shed a balm of healing wherever he went. But when Doctor Carson

tenderly lifted Hi's wounded head, dressed the poor mangled scalp with light swiftness, and cleansed, with all of a woman's skilfulness of touch, the places that the boys had not dared to touch, Mont changed his mind, and Barney and Arty looked on with grateful admiration.

"I will stay with you until he recovers consciousness," said the doctor. "He will rally presently."

It was now late into the night, but nobody cared to sleep until they knew whether life or death was before their comrade. Doctor Carson had spoken cheerily, but he had given no opinion; none had been asked, and the boys dropped wearily about, while the doctor, with his chin resting on his hand, sat steadfastly and thoughtfully regarding Hi.

Presently the young fellow stirred out of his long trance, and, moving his hand, heavily whispered: "The other pocket! the other pocket!"

The doctor started forward to catch the words, when Hi, calmly opening his eyes, looked up at him with surprise and said: "Well, what of it?"

Doctor Carson smiled and said, pleasantly: "So it was the other pocket, was it?"

Hi looked at him with a queer, puzzled air, and feebly replied: "I don't know about that. Was I hurt much?"

"Not much to speak of, my man. But I wouldn't

talk about it now. In the morning you can tell us all about it."

But Hi persisted. "I always allowed that there tunnel would cave. I meant to have timbered it to-morrow or next day." And here Hi painfully raised his hand to his head, shuddered, and, as if shocked at the discovery of his wounds, relapsed into unconsciousness again.

The gray dawn was struggling into the cabin, when Arty, sick and faint with waiting and watching, awoke from an uneasy sleep on the floor. The young doctor still sat, alert and vigilant, by the side of Hi's bunk; Mont was near at hand with all his usual freshness and helpfulness. Barney slept with his head leaning forward on the table, while Tom and Johnny were yet sound asleep in their own places.

Hi had asked for water once or twice during the night, but beyond that he had made no sign of coming back to life. So they sat and watched and waited. The bright morning rose up fresh and clear over Table Mountain, flooding the valley with its redness. Sounds of early labor came from the scattered cabins in the flat. The creaking of the flutter-wheels which had kept on through the night was now confused with other noises, as the miners began another day's work. Smoke curled from the rude chimneys of Hoosiertown; faint odors of frying meat floated on the tranquil air,

and two or three red-shirted citizens, groping their way out into the light, stretched themselves heavily and yawned with a tremendous yawn, the echoes of which reached Arty, where he sat against the wall of the cabin looking out, sad-eyed and dejected, through the open door.

Mrs. Dobbs, who had been often by the sick man's side the night before, now put her head in at the door and whispered: "How is he by this time?"

The doctor said: "He's looking better."

Then Hi suddenly awoke and said: "You allow it's a pretty bad hurt, do you, mister?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "but you will come out all right; don't worry about it. You are feeling pretty well now?"

"Right peart, 'cept about the head. My head is as light as a feather. Oh, yes, I remember it all now. The tunnel caved in on me. When I felt the rock coming down on me, and heard 'em patterin' on my head and shoulders, I made for the mouth of the tunnel. I just remember how the sun blazed into my eyes when I staggered out on the side-hill. It seemed as if the world was all afire, comin' out of that there dark hole, and facing the glare of the sun."

"Well, well, I wouldn't go on no more about it now, Hi," said Mrs. Dobbs. "The doctor says you must be kept quiet."

But, though urged to keep still, Hi continued: "I allow I must have put for home. I saw the road. It was all red dust, and the sun poured down over it. But I disremember how I got over it. It appears like I was carried."

"Yes," said Mont, "the fellows over to the blue tent were coming up from their claim. They saw you sitting in the road, wounded, and they brought you home."

"Good fellows, those blue-tent chaps. Whereabouts was I then?"

"Just at the angle of the road, where it breaks around the mountain."

"What? away down there!" exclaimed Hi. "Why, I must have staggered along right smart. Certainly I disremember anything that happened after I got out into the sunlight."

The doctor here put in his emphatic protest against Hi's having any more talk. So the wounded man lay quite still, muttering to himself: "Cur'ous! cur'ous!"

Although Hoosiertown was a busy place, the good-hearted miners found time to call at the cabin and inquire how Hi was getting on, and to bring little gifts to the invalid.

In a day or two he grew weaker and more infirm in his mind, and sometimes he seemed wandering and "luny," as Nance expressed it. The girl was very

"THEY SAW YOU SITTING IN THE ROAD, WOUNDED, AND THEY BROUGHT YOU HOME?"

helpful to the distressed family, but Arty was quite out of patience with her shyness. She was as bright and impertinent as ever at times; but usually she seemed so dignified and reserved that Arty quite agreed with Tom, who pronounced her "stuck up."

Doctor Carson came and went every day, and looked on Hi's frequent lapses of mind with some anxiety. On one of these occasions, Hi, as if struggling with some imaginary foe, painfully muttered: "Don't strike again. Don't! Don't! It's in the other pocket!"

"Oh, sho!" said Tom, "he's always saying that when he has those spells."

"Always saying that?" asked the doctor, sharply. He had been watching Hiram; but he could make nothing satisfactory out of the case.

"Yes," replied Tom, "two or three times, when he has had these wandering spells, he talks like that. And he talks all sorts of ridiculous things. Drivin' cattle, and so on."

Doctor Carson was puzzled. When Hi grew better he asked him about the accident. Hi was very clear in his story. He perfectly remembered the caving in of the tunnel. He felt the rocks fall on his head and shoulders; but most completely he recalled to mind how the bright sunshine dazzled his eyes when he came out to the mouth of the tunnel, and how red the dusty road under the bluff looked, as he caught a glimpse

of it and fell. It was a clear case to him. "I allow I know what happened," he said, with some impatience.

Hiram murmured and fretted over this loss of time. "It was just his luck," he said, "to be laid up when he was on the edge of a good streak of dirt." But he consoled himself with the reflection that his last day's work was a good one.

"Must have had ten or twelve ounces," he chuckled. "By the way, where is that there bag?"

Nobody had seen it. Hi had been in the habit of bringing home the result of his day's work in a buckskin bag, which had been a company affair. Arty had printed "Bostons" on it with pen and ink; and a scorched mark near the mouth of it gave it another feature. But that particular bag was nowhere to be found. Nobody had seen it since the day when Hi put it in his pocket, and had gone to work on that unfortunate day. Hi was sure that he had his gold in it when he left the tunnel. He had crammed it into the left-hand pocket of his jacket, for he was just ready to leave the tunnel when the crash came. But it was not in the garments which he wore that day.

"I must have dropped it when I staggered down the hill. Some of you boys go look for it, won't you? You'll find it in the grass along the trail, maybe, or at the mouth of the tunnel."

Tom and Johnny darted off to look. They were gone an hour or two, but found no pouch. Hi fretted and worried.

"Did you go into the tunnel?" he demanded.

"Of course not," replied Tom, sharply. "We just looked in a little ways. You must have dropped it on the trail and somebody picked it up."

"Oh, you shiftless!" scolded Hi. "I'll look myself as soon as I get out."

But the poor fellow did not get out as soon as he expected. He recovered slowly, and his spells of mental wandering returned frequently, to the great distress of his comrades.

They made no account of his queer mutterings. He was continually talking in a vague way, and about all sorts of things, when his mind was thus unsettled. He seemed to be in a kind of nightmare at such times. He raved incessantly about gold. Gold was the burden of his talk, and if he was not picking it up in his dreams he was defending his treasure against the assaults of imaginary robbers, with whom he often pleaded: "Don't strike me again! It's in the other pocket!"

Doctor Carson questioned Hi about his accident, when he was in full possession of his senses. He weighed his words and vigilantly watched him while he was awake or asleep, and when he was wandering in his mind. There was no clue to his wild talk. But the

doctor was sure that the wounds on Hi's head were not made by a caving wall.

One day, having asked for the shortest way to the tunnel, Doctor Carson rode up to that long-neglected work. Dismounting, he lighted a candle, which he found laid in a rift of rock, just where Hi had left it, and stepped carefully into the tunnel. It had been run in about twenty feet. Groping along, he soon reached the face wall at the end where Hi's pick and shovel lay as he left them weeks ago. The roof was as solid and firm as ever. The few rough props put in to support it were all there. There had been no cave.

Amazed, yet partly relieved, the doctor felt his way back to the light, blew out his taper and sat down to think. There was the flood of sunlight, just as Hi saw it; and the red road, which met his eye as he staggered out, still wound down to the camp.

When Doctor Carson returned and gravely said: "There was no cave in the tunnel," everybody echoed: "No cave?"

Hi said: "I'll have to take your word for it, doctor. But I'll give you my word that that there tunnel did cave and bust my crust, so now!"

CHAPTER XXVII

NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

"LETTERS! letters!" shouted Arthur, with great glee, one night, as the tired miners came up to their cabin from the claim. They had had good luck during the past few days; but even the sight of much gold, now no longer strange, could not wholly relieve the feeling of weariness which comes from long and exacting labor. The glimpse of a bundle of letters from home, which Arty shook in their faces as they approached the cabin, banished all fatigue. Nothing was so precious as these much-worn packets of news and loving messages from friends far away. They had been handled a great deal since they arrived in San Francisco. Bearing the marks of travel, as well as the queer red and blue stamps of the express companies, these letters had hunted for the young emigrants all the way from Sacramento and Nye's Ranch through various diggings and camps. A bright-eyed, alert-looking young fellow, mounted on a scrubby but speedy mustang, had dashed into town, dropped a few packages at "Freeman & Co.'s agency," bandied compliments with the loungers about the place, mounted

his steed again, and had loped off in a more leisurely way toward Sardine Gulch.

Dropping his preparations for supper, Arty had raced across "the branch" to the store, where he was rewarded with a huge package of letters, for which the enormous express charges seemed to him a small price. Letter-carriage in those days was costly; nobody knew what the rates were; they varied every week, but anywhere from a dollar to five dollars for a single letter—the original postage on which was ten or twenty cents—was not thought an unreasonable charge. The boys murmured sometimes, when they had read their infrequent letters many times; but nobody thought of grumbling until the first excitement of receiving letters was over, and the brisk young express-rider was far away.

A pleasant excitement reigned in the cabin of the young miners while news from home was read and discussed. The Sugar Grove folks had received their California gold with great pride and delight. The neighbors had all been in to look at it before it was taken to town and sold. Other Lee County people, scattered through California, had sent home gold, but the brothers of Barnard and Arthur wrote that no such gold as this had ever been seen before in those parts. How proud and thankful they were! The mortgage on the farm was now to be paid off; brother

Sam was to have the double-barrelled shot-gun (which he had long coveted) before the season for prairie-chickens came again. The mother had bought a new rocking-chair for father; and there was even some talk of having a hired girl to help about the house.

Arty read and re-read these simple details of the far-away home-life with glistening eyes, and then looked out on the ragged mining camp, the turbid creek, the hill-sides covered with furze and chaparral, and wondered if it were possible that these existed on the same planet that held his old home—the tidy Lee County farm.

Hi, who was now able to get about his work after a feeble fashion, grew pensive over his letters, and began to think that home was, after all, a better place for him than this, even though he should not carry a fortune to it. Mont encouraged this idea; and he, too, looked up from the finely-written pages which had come all the way from New England to him, with a bright face and tenderness in his eyes.

Most of all, however, were the boys interested in an extraordinary letter which Johnny received from a lawyer in Richardson. Farmer Stevens had put into this man's hands all the facts about Johnny's parentage and supposed wrongs, and he had traced up the case as far as possible. Mr. Stevens wrote to his boys that there was a good prospect of recovering the

property which Johnny's faithless guardian had taken possession of, but some legal documents were needed; and the lawyer had written to Johnny to inform him of all that had been done. This is the lawyer's letter, written in a stiff, upright hand:

RICHARDSON, LEE COUNTY, ILLS., April 9, 18—.

MASTER J. F. BLUEBAKER.

RESPECTED SIR: I have to communicate to you the following facts concerning your case, which I have undertaken at the instance of Obadiah L. Stevens, Esq., a worthy citizen of Sugar Grove Township, this county, with whose sons, or other relatives, I understand you are associated in business.

To wit: Ophelia Bluebaker, maiden name Jenness, your mother, as I now understand the case, was left a widow with one child, name, John Francis Bluebaker, about seven years ago. The widow resided near Oregon, Ogle County, this State, where she held legal possession of landed property, stock, fixtures, agricultural implements, the schedule of which now exists in the Probate Court Records of said Ogle County, Oregon being the shire town thereof. In due process of nature, Mrs. Bluebaker died, leaving her infant son to the guardianship of her brother, one John F. Jenness, a veterinary surgeon, commonly called a horse-doctor, of Lick Springs, Vermilion County, this State.

The property hereinbefore mentioned passed with the boy (who was, I beg leave to say, yourself) into the custody of said Jenness. This person, being the only surviving relative of Mrs. Bluebaker, your respected mother, except yourself, seems to have conceived the idea of secreting or otherwise fraudulently disposing of the lad—meaning yourself. Jenness, commonly called Dr. Jenness, as nearly as I can discover, had already managed to convert to his own use and behoof a portion of the income of the estate of the late Bluebaker; and, if the facts which come to me are trustworthy, he employed one William Bunce and Ephraim W. Mullet to carry the boy, meaning yourself, to California, and "lose"

him on the way. For this unlawful service said Bunce and Mullet were to receive an outfit for California, and the boy was to be provided with a sum of money which would subsist him for a time if left in a strange place; but it may occur to an unprejudiced person that the money given to the boy, which was in gold, might also have been intended to tempt the ruffians to dealing foully with him.

These facts are partly derived from the admissions which the said W. Bunce has made to the Messrs. Stevens, Morse, and Fender, in California. But they are, with additions, confirmed by the affidavits of one Polly Gardner, an inmate and housekeeper in the family of the late Jenness. I say the late Jenness, because that person was killed by being thrown from his wagon, in February last. Proceedings may be instituted to recover for you the unexpended portion of your estate, as soon as you choose a legal guardian and have forwarded to your attorney (in which capacity I should be pleased to serve you) the necessary papers. I am unfamiliar with the laws in your somewhat unsettled country; but presume that a power of attorney given to Mr. Stevens, from your guardian when chosen, would enable him to institute proceedings to recover.

I have the honor, sir, to subscribe myself,
Your ob't serv't,

CYRIL H. DUFFER,
Att'y-at-Law.

P. S.—It may interest you to know that the estate hereinbefore referred to is variously estimated by experts, who are neighbors, at from twenty-five thousand dollars to thirty thousand dollars value. C. H. D.

"What a prosy old duffer!" cried Tom, when the reading was concluded.

"Twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars!" said Hi, putting his hand painfully to his head. "That's a power of money. More'n I ever hope to take home with me. Thirty thousand! Well, that beats me."

"You're rich before us, Johnny," said Arty, with an honest glow of satisfaction. "But," he added with concern, " you'll have to leave us and go home to look after your property."

"Oh, no," Mont explained. "He need not go until he gets ready. We can go down to Sacramento, or to the new Mayor at Marysville, and have the papers fixed up for him. By the way, Johnny, what are you going to do about a guardian?"

"A guardeen," repeated Johnny, with a troubled air. "Who will be my guardeen? Will you, Arty?"

Everybody laughed, and Mont said:

"No, Johnny, you must have a guardian who is twenty-one years of age. Arty's too young, you know."

"Then I'll take Barney," said the boy quickly; and appealing to Barnard, he said: "Will you be my guardeen, Barney? I must have one, and I don't know anybody else, scarcely, but you."

"Yes," cried Barney heartily, "I'll be your guardian. But I shall have to give bonds, I suppose. Shall I, Mont?"

Mont, thus appealed to, thought all that could be arranged satisfactorily, but he was not sure about the bonds; and Johnny, with a gleam of light in his sober face, put his hand in Barnard's, and said:

"Isn't it something like a father-in-law, this guardeen?"

The matter was, on the whole, easily arranged. It was not necessary to go to Sacramento in order to secure the necessary legal papers. An accommodating magistrate was found nearer home; and though the machinery of the law was somewhat rude in the region of Hoosiertown, it satisfied the needs of the young miners, and the papers were made out and sent home.

"You can call him 'pap,' I suppose, now," said Tom, rather enviously, when Barnard was declared to be the lawful guardian of Master John F. Bluebaker.

"And a young-looking father he is, too!" struck in Arty, who was highly amused with this novel turn of affairs. "Call him 'guardy,' Johnny; it's just as good as anything else."

"I never called anybody 'pap,'" said the poor boy. "I never knew anybody to call 'father,' but I'll do just what Barney says."

"Never mind, my laddie," said Barnard. "Call me whatever you please. But I don't want any handle to *my* name. 'Barney,' or even 'Barney Crogan,' is good enough for me, although that young scapegrace of a brother of mine did put on the Crogan."

"Now, don't put on any airs, Barney Crogan," joined in Nance, who took part in all the family councils on the subject of Johnny's future prospects. "Crogan you be, and Crogan you'll stay, guardeen or no guardeen, you can jest bet yer—I mean, that is,

you may be very sure," and Nance coughed violently to hide her confusion.

"Hello!" cried Tom, rudely, "if Nance didn't come nigh saying 'you bet yer life,' just like she used to. Laws sakes alive! Miss Nancy Dobbs, how peart you have growed!" and the boy minced along the cabin floor, stepping on the tips of his bare toes and drawing up his shoulders, as if imitating some imaginary fine lady.

The girl flashed up suddenly, and before Tom knew what was going to happen, she gave him such a cuff that he tumbled headlong into a corner, where he fell ingloriously into a confused huddle of pots and pans.

"Come, now! I say, Nance, jest you strike a feller of your size, can't you?" And, red with anger, Tom scrambled out of the way and regarded Nance with some defiance as well as shame.

The boys laughed at Tom's discomfiture, but Nance, with some mortification in her turn, said:

"I beg pardon, Tom; I didn't mean to cuff you. But if you give me any of your chin—I mean if you sass me that way—well, no matter what I mean." And Nance walked off without another word.

"There, now!" said Hi, angrily; "you've been and vexed the best gal in Hoosiertown, and it'll serve you right if she don't come into this shebang ag'in for a week."

"Say the only gal in Hoosiertown and you'll hit it,"

replied Tom, surlily. "'Cause you're sweet on Nance, must she go for to fetch me a bat on the side of the cabesa like that? Whew! but she's got a heavy hand, though!" And Tom rubbed his head, with a comical air of misery.

"If you didn't know I was weakly," said his brother, with a very red face, "you wouldn't dare to sass me like that. Take that, impudence!" and here Hi's tin cup flew over Tom's head, that young gentleman having dodged just in time.

But, though Hiram was yet "weakly," he was now able to work quite regularly in his claim. He had insisted on timbering the rude tunnel; he had a dread of its caving in upon him "again," as he expressed it—for Hi had never been able to get rid of the idea that he had been injured by the falling of the roof of his tunnel. As a matter of opinion, he "allowed" that Doctor Carson was right; but he habitually spoke of his wounds as the result of "that cave." He was afraid the roof would "drop again."

"But the roof *did not* drop, Hiram," said the doctor, one day when Hiram was discussing the prospects of his claim.

"How did my head get caved in, then?" demanded Hi. "That's what I want to know."

"And that's what *I* want to know," replied the doctor, fixing his keen eyes on Hi's face. "You are

found wounded and bleeding in the road, a quarter of a mile from the claim. You say you have been caved in upon by the tunnel. But the tunnel is not disturbed in the least. To this day it is all sound overhead. Nobody supposes you would tell a wrong story about your misadventure, Hiram. But how were you injured? That's what we want to know."

Hi had only one story to tell. And if Doctor Carson had any theory of his own (and very likely he had), he gave no hint of what it was. In his occasional "spells," as Tom impatiently called them, Hi maundered on about his jacket being heavy and the day warm; and he almost always pleaded with some imaginary comrade that "it" was "in the other pocket."

Mont gently tried at such times to get Hi to explain. "What is in the other pocket, old fellow? Where is your pocket?" But Hi only struggled painfully, and begged, "Don't hit me ag'in! Oh, don't!"

It was pitiful. "I give it up," said Mont. It was no use trying to draw the secret from him.

Hi murmured and grumbled a great deal about his lost bag of dust. Nevertheless, he was now meeting with good fortune in his claim. He worked at a great disadvantage. Tom was not a valuable assistant, and Hi's health was very feeble indeed. He seemed to have lost much of his old ambition, though he was covetous and avaricious. Sometimes he was obliged to leave

off work for several days at a time. When he went back to his claim, he felt more like sitting down in the mouth of the tunnel and musing—while Tom went gunning for gophers—than striking with pick or shovel.

"Just my ornery luck," he said, discontentedly one day, as he sat complaining to himself by a heap of dirt thrown out from the tunnel. He aimlessly threw the lumps of sand and dried earth at a stake which marked a miner's "corner" near by. And as he sat tossing the dirt, his thoughts were not in the diggings. He was thinking of Nance.

"Powerful nice gal!" muttered Hi to himself. "Chirky and peart, but dreffle sassy. My gosh, what a tongue!"—and Hi let fly another lump at Gubbins's corner stake. "Just my ornery luck!"

Then he got half-way up, and, trembling with excitement, crawled on his hands and knees to the little heap of earth which had fallen apart where it struck the stake. He snatched the crumbly mass in his hands. It was whitish-yellow, sprinkled with small angular bits of pure white stone; but all through it were lumps, streaks, and jagged wires of gold.

"Gosh all Friday! I've struck a quartz lead! I've struck it! I've struck it!" And Hi, in a delirium of joy, pressed the precious handful to his lips, as if to devour it.

Tom, who was patiently waiting by the side of a

gopher-hole on the hill-side above, his pistol ready for the first appearance of its persecuted tenant, looked down and saw his brother's extraordinary actions.

"Another spell onto him, I s'pose," complained Tom and he sauntered down to Hi's relief.

Poor Hiram looked vacantly at his brother when he came down, brushed the glittering dust off his face with a great effort, and said: "Don't hit me ag'in! It's in the other pocket."

CHAPTER XXVIII

DEVELOPMENTS

The news that a rich quartz lead had been discovered on Brush Hill created a tremendous excitement in Hoosiertown. Only a few claims had been located in that region, and those that were worked were only considered as paying fairly. Before night every foot of ground along the hill was taken up. Very little was then known about quartz-mining. Here and there, deposits of decayed yellowish quartz rock, richly speckled with gold, had been found. These had usually been dug out speedily with pick and shovel. The rock was easily pulverized, and, being pounded in an iron mortar, or even between two smooth stones, the golden grains in it were thus loosened and secured. But much of this flint-like quartz was pure white and as hard as adamant. The miners looked at it covetously and passed on to find gold in a more accessible condition.

Lately, however, there had been some experiments at quartz-mining with machinery in the southern mines. There ran a rumor that fabulous sums had been made by crushing the gold-bearing quartz in the Mariposa

country, where some new kind of machinery had been put up for that purpose. Then, too, there came inflaming reports of rich quartz mines being found and worked in Tuolumne. The rock was crushed by "arastras," as the Mexicans called them, a simple invention of old times. The arastra was something like a huge grindstone, revolving on an axis, one end of which was made fast to an upright turning-post in the centre of a circle, and the other end was moved around by mules or cattle. The great stone, revolving over the half-broken quartz which was laid in a large circular trough, crushed all before it. Powdered quartz and free gold were gathered up in a wet paste, and the precious stuff was then separated from the refuse.

Very soon, quartz-mining became "all the rage," and everybody wanted to try it. The rude mortar and arastra served to extract only the larger particles of gold; probably, more was wasted than was saved. The miners, in their eagerness to crack open the rocky ledges, snatch the large pieces of gold, and go away, threw aside everything that did not promise them an immediate return.

The fame of the Mariposa and Tuolumne quartz ledges had reached Hoosiertown and Brush Hill diggings. Some restless prospectors had dug down below the surface where they had found lumps of white rock

sticking up through the soil, like a coat-sleeve out at the elbow. But nobody had found gold-bearing quartz; it was thought an unlikely thing that it should exist here. And when Hi's discovery was announced, everybody said at once that they "always knew there was quartz in that hill." In Hi's little tunnel, now famous, he found a thin vein of rock just cropping above the irregular floor of the chamber. It was a loose, friable sort of rock, full of cracks and holes, easily scraped off with a strong shovel, yellowish-white and gray in color, and mottled with gold. Hi had shovelled up some of this loose rock, which soon became covered with dirt, and was dumped out with what was thought to be worthless stuff. When Hi accidentally cracked open one of these rich lumps of golden rock, it flashed on him that he had at last found what the whole country was looking for—a quartz lead.

"A fool for luck," said some of the Hoosiertown miners when they found that Hi had blundered on a mine of gold. Then they rushed out to Brush Hill and covered it over with stakes and notices of claims. Men who were making fortunes in the river diggings, or in the ravine claims, dropped everything else and seized upon quartz-mining as affording the very shortest road to riches. It was early in the forenoon when Hi, weak and overcome by his sudden discovery, had

fallen in a fit. Tom, with great amazement, had wiped the golden dust and dirt from his brother's face, and had dragged him into the cool shadow of the tunnel, where he gradually recovered. It was noon when Hiram, feverish and trembling, was able to examine his vein of quartz and gold, and tell his nearest neighbors of his luck. Before the sun went down that night, Brush Hill was looked upon as a bank on which hundreds of men were to present checks in the shape of picks and shovels, and draw gold in any quantity.

Hiram was the hero of the hour. He bore his fame with indifference, and announced his readiness to sell out and go back to the States. Everybody wanted to buy. Nobody was willing to say what the claim was worth. Some men thought it ought to bring one hundred thousand dollars. There were those who said that capitalists at the Bay, as San Francisco was called, would jump at a chance to give two millions for it.

"Two millions!" whispered Hi to himself. "What a heap of money! Is there so much in this yere world?"

Nevertheless, nobody offered to buy the mine at any specified price, and Hi and Tom went on slowly digging in it.

One Sunday morning, when Hoosiertown was given up to the cleaning, cooking, mending, and letter-writing, with which that day was always occupied in

the mines, a rough-bearded, red-shirted, booted miner rode down the divide just south of Table Mountain, and made his way into Hoosiertown. Stopping at the express office, a log hut of noble dimensions, he inquired for "the boys from Crowbait, whosumdever they might be."

He was directed to the cabin where Mont, Barnard, Hi, and the three boys were gathered about the door. Without wasting words on the loungers at the express office, he cantered across the branch, dismounted, and saluted the party with, "Howdy? Nice day."

Seating himself on Arty's chopping-block, he opened his errand.

"Which of you fellers is Hi Fender?"

"That's my name," answered Hi.

"How's yer head?" he asked, with a curious grin. "I'm from Cherokee Flat, t'other side of the divide."

"Tolerable-like," said Hi. "Glad to see ye. My head's improvin', thank ye. How's yerself?"

"It's just like this," said the stranger, in a queer and inconsequent way. "We caught a feller a-robbin' Kentucky Bob's sluice, over to Cherokee, last night. Bob let drive at him and shot him in the leg—winged him, so to speak. Dark night, yer see, or Bob'd done better. Anyhow, the thief couldn't get away, and we boys turned out and tied him up for the night. This mornin' he war tried. Do yer foller me?"

His listeners assured him that they understood him, and he went on.

"When he was gone through with, we lighted on a bag of dust stowed away in his traps. Look yar," and the man opened a buckskin bag and poured into the crown of his hat a handful of coarse gold. "This yar," he said, parting some grains of light-colored yellow metal from the other, "is Cherokee gold. All on our side of the divide, leastways as fur as we've prospected, is like that thar. This yar,"—and here his stumpy finger poked out some coarser bits of dark reddish gold,— "this yar came from your side of Table Mountain. Brush Hill gold, bein' a gold-sharp, I mought say."

Nobody replied.

"Now yer see that when we went through this yar galoot, we found his buckskin full of all sorts and kinds. Sure as shootin' he had been playin' it low down on any number of honest miners. Not bein' an honest miner himself, he had bin goin' for everything in sight on both sides of Table Mount'in. D'yer foller my meanin'?"

Mont, rather impatiently, said that they did, and would like the rest of his story.

"*Pre*-cisely," said the man, "and jest what I was comin' to when you interrupted me. Seein' as how this chap didn't hev long to live, we gave him warnin' to

make a clean breast of it, which he did. He hadn't sold no dust, but had packed it away in holes and crevices, where we found most of it. This yar dark gold, from the south of the divide, he allowed was some out of a lot that he got away with belongin' to a chap by the name of Fender. Yar it is writ out, yer see, by the clerk of the meetin'. 'Hiram Fender,' which is you, accordin' to 'pearances." And the man saluted Hi, with gravity.

Hiram looked at him painfully and with a troubled expression, and said:

"I allow he must have found my bag when I dropped, the day I was caved in on."

"Nary time, stranger. He confessed that he laid for you better'n four days, a-waitin' fur you to get where he could knock you over and go fur yer buckskin. One day, he war on the nigh side of Table Mount'in as yer went down the trail from yer claim. Yer slouched along right under whar he war, leastways so he allowed to us. Then he rocked yer. The first dornick took yer plum' on the cabesa, and yer dropped in yer tracks. He let fly another at yer, climbed down the bluff, went through yer clothes, nipped yer buckskin, and lit out. Leastways, so he let on to us at the meetin'."

"Good Heavens!" said Mont, "this is an amazing story!"

Arthur, whose eyes had opened wider and wider while the story was being told, exclaimed:

"Do you know this man's name?"

"Well, I disremember. Usual he war called Lame Bill, but I allow it war some such name as Bunch."

"Bunce!" cried the boys.

"You've hit it. Bunce war his name."

"*Was* his name?" said Barnard. "You don't mean ——"

"*Pre*-cisely. What little he had to say, he said a-standin' on a wagon-box, with a rope around his neck, and it over a convenient sycamore handy by. The boys war a-buryin' of him when I left."

"Lynched?" said the boys with horror.

"Lynched it war. But everything reg'lar. He couldn't hev asked for no sq'arer game. Chairman, clerk, rope-committee, and everything accordin' to rule. Oh, we're a law-abidin' lot on *our* side of the divide."

This was slightly sarcastic, for there had been some scandalous irregularities reported of the Hoosiertown people.

"Law-abidin' people and travel on the sq'ar.' Your friend Bunch went off like a lamb."

"Did he really say that he dropped rocks on my head?" asked Hi, who could not believe this story.

"Sartin, sartin. Didn't yer feel 'em?"

"No," said Mont. "Hi has never had a clear idea of what happened. The first blow made him insensible, probably, and his brain was so affected by the hurt that he had a notion that he had been caved on while in the tunnel. He never knew what hurt him."

"Sho, now!"

"It is a very strange case. Did Bunce say how Hi behaved when he was robbed of his bag of dust?"

"I disremember pertickler. But he did say that while he war a-goin' through yer pardner thar, that he sorter freshened up a bit, and sung out to Bunch, so he did, and says, 'Don't hit me ag'in; it's in the other pocket'—meanin' the dust, yer see. With that, Bunch he clips him another, which finishes him, he allowed. Then he grabs the buckskin, does Bunch, and breaks for tall timber."

"The story is complete, Hi, my boy," added Barney. "I guess Dr. Carson had it all figured out, except as to the robber. You know Arty saw Bunce from the hill."

"I'm clean beat, and don't know anything about it," said Hiram, discontentedly. And he sat back from the group with the air of one who has no further interest in a discussion.

"And yar," said the stranger, producing an empty buckskin bag, "yar is a bag that we allowed belonged over yar. Hit's got 'Boston' onto it, and you chaps hail from thereaway, they say."

"My bag!" exclaimed Arty. "I marked that on there and gave the bag to Hi. Was there anything in it?"

"No," said the man. "Hit war stowed inside of another buckskin. Both on 'em war buried near a lone pine, where we found 'em 'cordin' to directions."

It was then explained that the "meetin'" at Cherokee had directed this envoy to leave with Hiram Fender the gold which had been sent over. It belonged to nobody at Cherokee. It was about equal in weight to the darker gold found among Bunce's deposits. The rest had been confiscated, by popular decree, for the relief of a distressed miner who was laid up with the rheumatism.

"One more question before you go," said Mont. "Did Bunce confess any other crimes before he was —hanged?"

"Heaps, heaps on 'em," replied the man. "But none that I set much by. Except he denied that he stole Columbus's money at Loup Fork, as one of our fellers said he did. It war his pardner, Eph Mullet, that did that. Leastways, so Lame Bill allowed. Hit don't matter now, anyhow."

So saying, he swung himself into his saddle, touched his horse's flank, clattered over the branch, down the trail, and disappeared in the thickets which covered the divide.

The boys looked at each other with a feeling of awe. Bill Bunce had at last met with his fate. He would lie and steal no more. With his lawless taking off had come the explanation of Hi's mysterious disaster. Here was conclusive proof that Hi had been living under a strange delusion. Indeed, he was still deluded. His comrades were satisfied that he had been waylaid, cruelly wounded, and robbed by Bunce. Arty and Johnny had seen the crime from the hill, though they had not seen Hiram in the road below. Arty went over the whole story again, point by point.

Hi only said: "Boys, it gets me. I give it up. I s'pose you're right. But I allow I shall never know how it happened."

CHAPTER XXIX

RECKONING UP THE GAINS

Hi's "luck" did not seem to desert him, although nobody made a distinct offer to buy his quartz lead. There was much talk about capitalists coming up from the Bay in search of just such investments as this. Somehow, they never came, and Hi went on with his work, his comrades occasionally giving him a helping hand. A week had passed since his great discovery, and the people who had taken up claims on Brush Hill were becoming discontented with their failure to "strike it rich." Hi steadily took out gold-bearing quartz in paying quantities; the gold was pounded out in a big iron mortar, brought at great expense from San Francisco.

One day Tom was industriously picking away at the loose vein of rock inside the tunnel, when he uttered a wild shriek, which made Hi drop his basket nervously and hurry to the spot. Tom had cleft off a thin layer of rock which slanted downward beneath the surface. About six inches below this was another similar layer, and between these two, as far as uncovered, was a

reddish-gray deposit of rotten rock, veined and mottled through and through with virgin gold. It was nearly one-half gold, glittering, sparkling, and in all sorts of shapes. Some of it was like ferns, in long and leafy sprays; some was like sheets of foil, crumpled and tumbled in the hand; and some was in thick splinters, as if it had been hammered into the crevices of the rock ages ago, before these quartz crystals had begun to decay.

Hi uttered a howl of delight, and seized the pick from Tom's unwilling hand. In a moment, he had laid bare the vein, which did not extend quite across the tunnel. Trembling with eagerness, he held the candle down to the shining mass, and said: "Millions! millions! millions!"

"And I struck it," added Tom, proudly.

"So you did, Tommy, my boy," said Hi, fondly. "So you did, and a right peart striker you be. You shall have a specimen out of this for a buzzum-pin, so you shall; and we'll go back to Sugar Grove and hold up our heads with them proud Gashwilers and Perkinses and all the rest."

And Hi lovingly laid a golden leaf in his hands and doubled it up, as if in mere wantonness of wealth. It was a wonderful thing to be able to handle one's own gold like that—just as if it were sheets of common tin.

"Now, you Tom, just keep your mouth shet about

this. Don't let it get around. We'll have the whole camp down on us if ye do."

"What!" cried Tom, opening his eyes very wide. "Not tell Mont and the boys?"

"Sartinly not! sartinly not!" replied his brother, and his face grew haggard and anxious as he regarded the glittering vein. "Nothin' to nobody. D'ye hear that?"

"Yes, I hear," said Tom, who was bursting to rush out and tell the news.

That night Hi went staggering home with the proceeds of his day's work, mingled with bits of broken quartz with gold sticking to them.

"What luck to-day?" asked Doctor Carson, checking his horse as he rode past the two brothers.

"Oh, just ornery, just ornery, Doctor. Times is dreffle mixed up, here," answered Hi, with something like a whine.

"Golly! what a whopper!" cried Tom, as the doctor rode off with a pleasant word and smile for the boys.

"Keep yer head shet, will yer, young one? You are the talkinest creature I ever came acrost. Didn't I say that things was mixed? Ain't that gettin' around the truth without strainin' it?"

But Hi felt guilty; and when he remembered how Doctor Carson had guessed out the whole truth about

the affair of Bunce, he was afraid that he might somehow divine the golden secret of the mine.

When Hi and Tom reached the cabin, they found the rest of the party in great excitement. Arty had that day found in the claim two nuggets, or chispas, worth at least five hundred dollars each.

"Aren't they beauties, Hi?" asked Johnny; and he rolled the potato-shaped lumps over and over on the supper-table.

"Hang it all, boys," said Hi, with a sudden burst of candor. "I didn't mean to tell. But just look at this yere." And he poured out the glittering contents of his sack.

"There now!" exclaimed Tom. "You've been and gone and told, and I kept shut about it!"

"Didn't mean to tell?" said Mont, with a look of surprise. "You don't mean to say that you would keep the good news from us, Hi?"

Hi blushed and explained that he wanted to keep the news of his rich strike from the rest of the camp. He could not keep it from the boys when he saw how frank they were. But it was all out now. Would the boys say nothing about it for the present?

There was no need. The very next day, Hi, scooping out the contents of the rift of rock in which his treasure lay, suddenly struck his pick against a hard wall. It was the virgin quartz—pure, white, adaman-

tine, and without a flaw or seam. In this shallow fissure the decayed gold-bearing quartz had been shut up for ages. A day's work had been sufficient to scrape it all out; and the pocket was empty.

Hi nervously plied his pick and shovel in all directions. For hours he dug and scratched at the rock, above, below, to the left and to the right. In vain; only barren quartz met him on all sides. Hi wiped his heated head and shoulders and sat down to rest, at last.

"There's no use talkin', Tom. This yere claim's played out. I'm goin' home."

And, in spite of Tom's remonstrances, Hiram deliberately shouldered his bag of ore and mining-tools, and set his face toward the tunnel's mouth. Reaching the open air, he blew out his candle, laid it carefully away in a crevice of rock, as if he was going away for the night. But, turning about, he said:

"Good-by, old tunnel. You've given me sorrer, and you've given me gold. We part friends. I'm bound for the States!"

"To the States!" re-echoed the boys in grand chorus, when Hiram, that night, announced his sudden determination.

"Yes. I've made my pile, you see. Not millions, nor even hundred thousands, but more'n I ever thought for when I started. It don't pay, this livin' in a hole in the ground."

"Well, I must say," said Barney, with deliberation, "this is a new freak for you. What has happened to change your mind about making that million that you thought you had struck?"

"Oh, I say, I wonder if it isn't because Nance and her folks are going home?" broke in little Johnny, with great simplicity.

"Yer talk too much, youngster," interrupted Hi, wrathfully; but he blushed red, nevertheless.

"We may as well all go together," said Arty. "We've sent home five thousand dollars, all told. Haven't we got as much more, share and share alike, Barney Crogan?"

They took account of stock, went over all their gains, and found that they would have, after selling their claim, thirty thousand dollars. This was a fortune to the boys. Divided, it gave Barney and Arthur fifteen thousand dollars between them, and the same to Mont and his little partner.

Hi and his brother, notwithstanding their occasional "spurts of luck," had not accumulated quite that total sum. Hi's sickness had disabled him, various expenses had eaten into the profits, and the gold never turned out to be so much in value as it looked.

The boys decided to go home.

CHAPTER XXX

HOMEWARD BOUND

People moved suddenly in those days. A miner would go to his cabin at night, grimy with a day's work, and leaving his pick and shovel in his claim, next day, clad in a "biled" (or white) shirt, and uncomfortable in "store clothes," he would wave a farewell from the top of the stage, or from the back of his mule, as he took his way to Sacramento, San Francisco, and the States.

Early in September, Jehiel Bush, seedy but cheery, dropped his mining kit in front of the Hoosiertown express office, and said to a noisy party of card-players within:

"Can any of this gay and garrulous crowd tell a passing stranger where to find the Boston boys?"

"Reckon you'll find 'em down about the Bay somewhar, strannger. It's your deal, Kaintuck," and the man went on with his play.

"Sho! you don't tell me so! Gone to the Bay! Made their pile?"

"They've made right smart, I hear," explained one of the lounging group. "Ye see, Nance she went with the old man Dobbs. Then the feller that struck it

up on Brush Hill, he went. Then that smart Boston chap, he went, and the whole kit and caboodle of 'em went."

"To the States?" said Bush, aghast.

"That's the size of it, strannger."

Bush looked down dejectedly, and murmured: "And I'm clean busted! Oh, it gets 'em! it gets 'em! One gal like that can clear out a hull camp." So saying, he shouldered his pack and moved on.

In those days there were steamers plying between San Francisco and Panama, laden with homeward-bound gold-hunters. Now and then there was a fearful disaster, and hundreds of men, with their faces turned toward home, sunk in the waters. In a little space, a ship-load of hopefulness, life, manhood, and treasure was swallowed in the sea. But, safely creeping down the coast, across the hot and gorgeous isthmus of Panama, and up the boisterous Atlantic, went our young adventurers.

It was a happy day when the boys, so lately from the rough wilds of California, found themselves in the glitter and excitement of New York. The streets seemed foreign to them, and the great stores were almost awful in their magnificence. But their thoughts ran out to the West, where father, mother, brothers, and sisters waited for them, day by day. It was hard parting with Mont; but he manfully insisted that it

was only for a time. They should meet again, and soon. He had lost his taste for city life; he would go out West, and settle down in Lee County, by and by. So he sped home to his mother.

In the houses of Stevens and Fender, at Sugar Grove, there was great rejoicing when the fortunate young gold-seekers, like seamen from the waters, came home in triumph. Farmer Stevens and Oliver had gone into town with their new farm-wagon, and, meeting the wanderers at the stage, had brought them out, bag and baggage, and with great acclaim, Arty standing up with a flag handkerchief on a ramrod, as the party drove up the farm-road. It was like the last act in a play, when all is happiness, reunion, and congratulation. The boys who had gone out with slender equipment, followed by hopes and fears, prayers and forebodings, had come again, rejoicing and bringing their golden sheaves with them.

"And this is little Johnny?" said the good mother, when Barney and Arty had been welcomed again and again.

"Yes, mother," broke in Arthur. "And he shall never go away, shall he? Say that's so, quick, because you know," and the lad dropped his voice, "he's got no home unless it is with us."

"Johnny shall stay with my boys ever and always, if he likes," said the mother.

Barnard, with a little air of authority, added: "I'm Johnny's guardian, and he shall stay with me."

"My son!" said the home-mother, her kindly arm about the orphan's shoulder. The lad's blue eyes were moist as he kissed his new mother. He was at home at last.

How Johnny came into his own again, and how he sent back to Mont all that was left of his own share of the gold, when he was once more settled—these and other things can be left to the imagination of the dear young folks who have followed the varying fortunes of the Boy Emigrants.

Prosperity came back to the Grove from the Golden Land. Barney, Arty, and Johnny told their adventures over and over again in the comfortable home of the Stevens family, and to willing ears.

Old man Fender thought that Hi had "missed it" by leaving his mining partners and striking out for himself. If Hi had not been ignorant, he said, he would have been more patient and more successful. So, as he leans over his fence-rail, smoking his pipe at eventide, he looks at the tidy Stevens farm, and mutters:

"Tell yer what—eddication's a great thing!"

THE END

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